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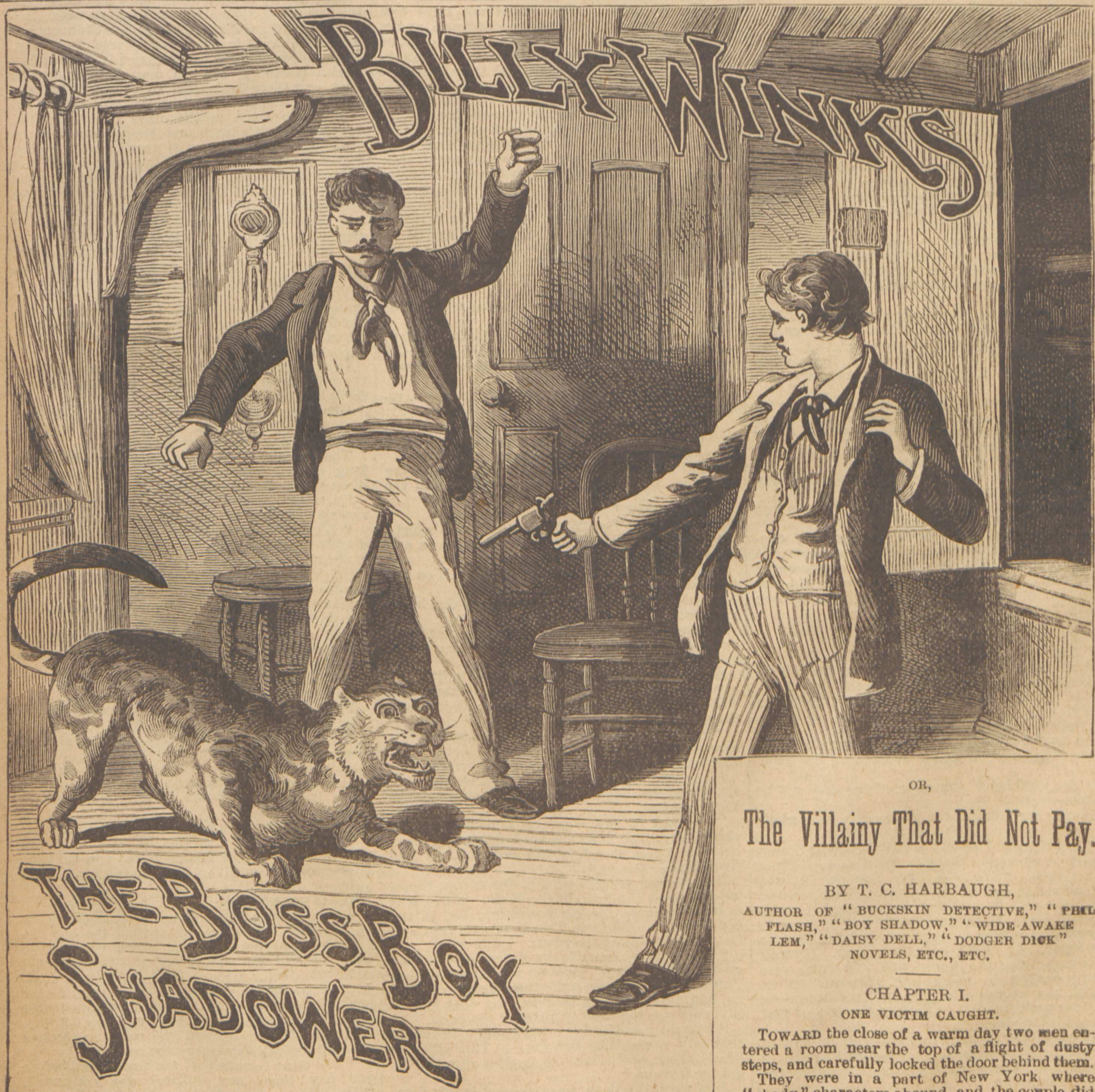
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OR,

The Villainy That Did Not Pay.

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AUTHOR OF "BUCKSKIN DETECTIVE," "PHIL
FLASH," "BOY SHADOW," "WIDE AWAKE
LEM," "DAISY DELL," "DODGER DICK"
NOVELS, ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

ONE VICTIM CAUGHT.

TOWARD the close of a warm day two men entered a room near the top of a flight of dusty steps, and carefully locked the door behind them. They were in a part of New York where "shady" characters abound, and the couple did not bear many marks of good reputation. The room itself was almost devoid of furniture

CLUTCHING THE WEAPON FIRMLY, THE UNDAUNTED BILLY FACED THE FIERCE BRUTE,
WAITING FOR THE SIGNAL FROM HER EQUALLY VICIOUS MASTER.

of every kind, and but two chairs and a rickety table greeted them when one turned on the gas.

"Don't you see that everything is working right to our hand?" remarked one of them. "We are on the right road to the biggest fortune ever picked up in this city, and, so far as I can see, nothing can get between us."

"Unless the old man himself should do that."

There was a coarse laugh.

"Which, of course, he could not do if he wanted to," was the reply. "Timothy Turk is utterly incapable of doing anything of the kind, and that makes our game doubly sure."

"Of course Mother Magog will never 'peach' on us."

"I'd like to see her do it!" and the speaker snapped his fingers. "She knows better than to say anything that would give our game away, for she has heard of me before and knows what I know about her and her beautiful son."

"That's a good club, Simon."

"I want no better. Mother Magog, who is slippery I acknowledge, won't dare to say a word while I have that club in my hands, and that will be forever if necessary."

Both men now took out cigars and lighted them, after which they cocked their feet upon the table and began to smoke.

By and by a footstep came up the stair, and they looked at one another.

"I guess that's the captain!" said one. "Now, let me do the talking and you listen, nothing more."

The steps approached the door, and a knock was heard.

Simon Slyboots arose and opened the portal, admitting a distinguished-looking man who bowed rather stiffly as he came forward.

"Captain Ortiz, this is the friend I told you about the other night," said Simon, waving his hand toward his companion, who went by the name of Reck Sloper. "I assure you he can be trusted in every particular. I have the utmost confidence in him, for I have seen him tried on more than one occasion."

The man designated as, Captain Ortiz, looked like a sea-faring man and a Spaniard, for his skin was dark and his eyes of the same hue.

Simon stood up to give the captain his chair, when the new-comer said:

"I have the papers with me and you can look them over. I think you will know better just what to do when you have done so."

Slyboots took the papers which the captain drew from an inner pocket and began to examine them.

"These papers say plainly that the money belonging to one Napoleon Gregg will fall to the boy Tom if he should survive his grandfather," he observed after examination.

"That's exactly what they say."

"And we are to have ten thousand if the boy should not survive his grandfather?"

There was a nod and a flash in the eyes that regarded Simon Slyboots and his pard.

"I guess we understand one another, captain," continued Simon. "You need have no alarm. By the way, how is the old gentleman?"

"About the same. The sea breeze did not help him one whit and he is slowly approaching death."

"There is but the one will?"

"There is but one."

"And the boy?"

"He lives in expectation of being the richest kid in this city when the old man shuffles off."

"If he lives he will be, of course," was the reply.

Captain Ortiz put on his hat.

"I must get back to the ship. I have business there, and now I leave everything in your hands."

"The confidence you repose in us shall not be misplaced."

In another moment the two rascals were alone again.

"Ten thousand is but a starter," cried Simon Slyboots, clutching Sloper's hand and grinning in his face. "We will have Captain Ortiz in our power as well as the money. Don't you see? The boy will be nothing to handle. I have already made his acquaintance and he seems to have taken quite a fancy to me. Going back to his vessel, eh? That isn't true, Reck. He isn't a square from the house and you have eyes sharp enough to track him. Go and do it. Track him wherever he goes and don't lose sight of him until he does go back to the ship, if that be not till morning."

Reck Sloper bolted from the room on hunt of Captain Ortiz while Simon remained a moment longer and then went out himself, locking the door behind him.

Half an hour later Simon turned up on a

handsome street and seemed to take some delight in watching a fine house of three stories.

Presently a boy came out and the moment Simon saw the slight figure his eyes lighted up and he went forward.

"Hello, Tom!" the sharp called out.

The boy, who was good-looking, well built and perhaps seventeen, looked up a little startled and changed color the moment he saw who had spoken.

"How's your grandfather?" asked Simon.

"About the same."

"No better, no worse, eh?"

"That's about it."

"Where were you going? out for a walk?"

"I was about to take a stroll through the Park to catch a little fresh air; it's so close in the house, you know."

"I was going over to the other side and there is where you get the purest air."

Tom Wagner, the boy, seemed to hesitate.

"We wouldn't be gone long and, then, I would like to talk with you, anyhow."

Somehow or other, Simon Slyboots, the black-leg, had secured a strange ascendancy over the heir to thousands, and for some time had been meeting him in odd places and talking about his grandfather who was dying of a singular malady which the shrewdest doctors in the city could not control. Tom could not have told why this man had gained his confidence, and it never occurred to him that he was in the pay of such a deep villain as Captain Ortiz, of the ship Centipede, which had come back from the West Indies within the last few days.

In a little time Tom found himself moving alongside of Simon, and both were headed toward the opposite side of the metropolis.

All the time Simon was talking and Tom would now and then get to put in a word or two.

By and by they reached a house which Simon said was occupied by a friend of his, and proposed that they should enter, at the same time saying that his friend was a traveler and had a museum of curiosities which he had picked up during his tours of the globe.

Now, Tom Wagner was fond of looking at such things, and this overcame his hesitancy and he entered the building.

Simon ushered him into a room which was rather dark and left him.

For some time the boy waited for his return, when he thought the chamber would be lighted up, and nearly an hour elapsed before he heard any noise.

All at once the door opened and a woman, instead of Simon Slyboots, came in.

"Well, how are you getting along?" she asked, and the moment she spoke a sense of fear seemed to take possession of the young heir.

"Not very well, as you might see. I am here all alone. Where is the man who left me in the dark?"

"Gone away."

In an instant Tom Wagner was upon his feet.

"What! did he decoy me to this house and then desert me?" he exclaimed.

"You may call it what you please. You are here and—"

"But I won't remain!" was the sudden interruption.

"Come, don't be foolish. You are here and are liable to stay some time," the woman coolly announced.

She was tall of figure and strongly built.

"I have to go back to my grandfather. He will fret himself to death over my absence and, then, I am his only heir."

"You are, eh?" laughed the woman, bending toward Tom and looking into his face. "If that's the case, I guess you're worth keeping."

In another moment the boy had sprung to a chair, and was holding it in a menacing manner above his head.

"Get out of my way, or I will bring this chair down upon your head. I am going back home, and you sha'n't stand between me and Grandfather Gregg."

But, instead of falling back, the woman threw out one hand and caught the chair. There was a brief struggle for its possession, and in the end it was twisted from Tom Wagner's grip, and he was flung across the room.

"You'll be almighty lucky if you ever see that grandfather again!" grinned the Amazon, and Tom from his corner, half-stunned, realized that he had fallen among wolves, and that Simon Slyboots was the head monster of the pack.

"I ought to suffer for having ever listened to that oily rascal," he thought. "This will kill grandfather, and some one besides myself will get the fortune."

Just then the door was slammed in his face, and he was alone in the room.

CHAPTER II.

SEND FOR THE POLICE.

CAPTAIN ORTIZ, unwatched as he thought, moved down the street until he reached the first corner, which he turned abruptly and went in another direction.

If he had looked back he might have discovered that he had Reck Sloper at his heels, and also that Mr. Sloper was watched in turn by a boy who had the movements of a young panther.

This boy was bright-faced and strong-limbed, and had the velvet step of a cat.

He kept Reck Sloper in sight, and was not long finding out that he was shadowing the Captain of the Centipede.

Captain Ortiz kept on until he came to a common-looking house, at the front door of which he knocked and was admitted.

"That is right where I thought he would land," mentally ejaculated Sloper. "There is where Mother Magog holds forth, and there seems to be a connecting link between her and the Captain of the Centipede."

Mr. Sloper drew off and began to watch the house, and the boy ferret kept his eye on him.

"I don't get tired watching the two pards, for they give me a good deal to do," the young beagle said to himself, while he watched Sloper. "They are up to something mean and dark. In the first place, they are hand-in-glove with Captain Ortiz, the Cuban; then, Simon Slyboots has wormed himself into the good graces of the boy, Tom, who is old Gregg's heir, as I found out last week. Secondly, the old man is near death's door, and there don't seem to be any living kin but Tom, his daughter's child. Now, Captain Ortiz, who came in the other day from the Tropics, and Slyboots and Sloper wouldn't be holding secret caucuses if there wasn't a deep game on hand. And from the way Simon has gained control over the boy, Napoleon Gregg's money is what the stake is. They can't get hold of it while the boy lives, that's pretty certain, but this sweet-scented crowd wouldn't stop at anything. This very night yet I will see the boy himself, and put him on his guard. I met him last week and struck up a sort of friendship, so I won't have to introduce myself now."

While Billy Winks, the young detective, is watching Mr. Reck Sloper who is waiting like a fox for Captain Ortiz to come out of the house, let us enter the building and see with whom the captain of the Centipede is talking.

In a small room rather loudly furnished sat Captain Ortiz and a woman, the latter about forty and rather handsome.

Her figure was immense in size, she looked like a giantess, hence the nickname she had secured, that of "Mother Magog."

The captain of the Centipede was smoking a long slender cigar which he took from his mouth whenever he wanted to talk.

"I think you've employed a precious pair of rascals to help you," said the woman.

"Why so? You told me yourself that there wasn't a cooler man in the city than Simon Slyboots."

"I don't go back on that either, but he is an unconscionable villain all the same."

"I couldn't get any satisfactory work out of an angel," smiled Captain Ortiz.

"Of course you couldn't. Now, I want to tell you one thing. When you pay them off it must be once for all."

"Will they try to bleed me?"

"They will do nothing else."

The hands of the Cuban captain were seen to shut.

"Oh, I know what you're thinking about," continued the woman smiling again. "You may think that you can turn on them and silence them. That will do to think about, but when it comes to doing it, that is a horse of another color."

"They don't know Captain Ortiz!"

"Yes, they do, and that is why they are serving you. Simon has promised you that the boy shall not outlive his grandfather, hasn't he?"

There was no reply.

"Your silence tells me that he has," she went on. "Well, he will see to it that the boy disappears—that he is put out of the way and so well that all the detectives of this city can't strike the trail. I know Simon Slyboots, I tell you. I could send him to where dogs never bark at people and no one knows this better than Simon and his pard, Sloper. Now—"

Mother Magog crossed the room and looked out into the hallway before she resumed.

"You must be sure that the boy is dead before you pay them one dollar," she continued. "They may swear that he is out of the way, but you know that so long as he lives he will be

Napoleon Gregg's heir. You must know everything, and guess at nothing. Simon Slyboots will take your money and still hold a winning card—a card stolen from the deck to help out his game. Then, there is Timothy Turk—

"The eccentric old man who haunts my footsteps with the story that he was beaten out of his money some years ago by a man who shipped in the Centipede?"

"The same old man! Timothy Turk is the boy heir's uncle; he has been aged by trouble, and is not so crazy as he lets on. He is on the trail of these men, Slyboots and Sloper, and they can't altogether silence him, though they think they need not fear him any more. Old Timothy will break up the whole game if he can. When do you sail again?"

"I can hoist anchor and go at any time, but I don't want to sail until I know that everything is well and that the sod covers Napoleon Gregg."

"The boy gets everything if he survives his grandfather, does he?"

"Yes."

"If he dies first, what?"

Captain Ortiz laughed.

"You ought to know without asking me," he answered. "The last clause in the will settles that matter. The whole estate falls to me."

"Why to you?"

The captain of the Centipede looked sharply for a moment at Mother Magog.

"I used to have another name," he explained. "There was a time when I was not the captain of the Centipede. I used to be Pedron Jarillo. Napoleon Gregg came to Cuba and I secured for him a handsome wife. That was years ago; she is dead, and he isn't far from the grave. He told me once that he would remember me in his will, for he lived happily with his Cuban wife. What has he done? Well, he gives his grandson, Tom Wagner, the whole estate in case he survives him, and if he should not, it falls to Pedron Jarillo, 'if he be living,' so reads the will; and the executors are empowered to hunt me up and see that I get the thousands left by the old man."

Mother Magog had listened to this with a smile at her lips, and when Captain Ortiz had finished, she spoke.

"In one sense I don't wonder that you are at the head of the game now being played. The stakes are worth playing for, for the old man is worth nearly a half million. That would enrich even you, and you would have to become Pedron Jarillo again."

"I would do that with pleasure. I have all the papers necessary to establish my identity. I am Captain Ortiz only for the present, and whenever the proper time comes, I will be Pedron Jarillo once more."

He stood erect and looked at the woman.

"But, remember: you must watch your tools," she warned.

"I will if you say so."

"I do say so," said Magog, firmly. "I know this man, Simon Slyboots, know and hate him."

"Don't you fear him, too?"

The cheek of the woman lost color.

"I do. I will be fair with you. I do fear him."

He looked her over and seemed to make a mental note of her strength.

"You are strong enough to finish him in a fair fight, but I don't want you to do anything of the kind until after he has served me in the game."

"I don't want to have to meet him. I have cause for fearing him, though perhaps I am strong enough to hold him against the wall and choke him to death. He is so full of tricks that are dark and devilish. I would sooner tackle his partner, Reck Sloper, for I believe he fears me."

"I will look out for the afterwork," assured Captain Ortiz. "I don't think I have lived fifty years for nothing."

"I hope you have not."

The next minute the captain of the Centipede was on the sidewalk, and Sloper, who had not left his place, looked delighted.

Once more he started after the Cuban, whom he tracked to the wharves, where he took a boat, and was propelled toward a vessel lying in the harbor.

"I can go back and see Tom now," said Billy Winks, turning back with Sloper. "There is being played a dark game, and if I am not mistaken the boy is in danger. Mother Magog seems to be mixed up in the scheme, and that is bad. I've got my hands full, but I've had 'em full before."

It took him some time to reach the street where lived the man known as Napoleon Gregg, and when he rung the bell at the side door he

looked into the face of a man who started at sight of him.

"Have you seen Tom?" asked this person, who was much excited.

"No. I came to see him myself, and—"

"He went off several hours ago, and the old gentleman is nearly dead with fright over his absence. I've been to the Park, where he usually goes for a little air, and all I could learn was that he was there awhile in company with a strange man. We're about to notify the police, for Mr. Gregg will have it so, and—"

At that moment a loud voice rung throughout the house.

"Send for the police at once! My dream is coming true. Tom Wagner has been kidnapped!"

"That is him now," said the servant. "What a voice he has for a dying man!"

Billy Winks did not wait to hear another word, but bounded away.

"I guess my work has begun," he cried. "The plot has already begun, and Tom Wagner is in the meshes, or I miss my guess."

In another minute the Boss Boy Shadower was a square from the scene of the excitement.

CHAPTER III.

BILLY WINKS ON DUTY.

NAPOLEON GREGG, the rich man gasping in bed and closely watched by three doctors, was waiting for news from Tom Wagner, his grandson, whom the police of New York were hunting for as though he had been gone several days and not a few hours.

The old man had but a few hours to live, and the doctors were doing their best to keep life in a frail body.

Outside, eying the house like a hawk with his body half in shadow, stood a man who had not taken his eyes from the building for a long time.

He seemed to be waiting for the announcement of old man Gregg's death, but as the moments flew by without bringing him that welcome intelligence, he grew nervous, like a man about to lose his prey.

This person was no less a character than the captain of the Centipede.

He knew what was up, and the failure of the man-hunters of New York to find Tom Wagner told him that Simon Slyboots had carried out his part of the game, and that there stood no one between him and the stricken man's fortune but old Gregg himself.

Captain Ortiz had disguised himself so that it would have been difficult for any one to have recognized him, and he was waiting in the shadows for tidings of the old man's death.

Meantime Billy Winks, the Boy Shadower, had not been idle.

Determined to look after the case without calling to his aid the several detectives whom he well knew, and to share with them no secret which he might pick up, he was hunting for Tom on his own hook and it would be very strange if he did not soon strike a trail of some kind.

He had discovered that the boy had been seen in the Park in company with a strange man, and he had guessed that that person was Simon Slyboots, the sharper.

Step by step he had tracked the pair almost across the city, but he lost the trail so suddenly that for a moment he was entirely nonplused.

It seemed as if the pavement had opened and swallowed both Tom and his kidnapper, and Billy Winks was in a quandary.

He came back to the house on the avenue while Captain Ortiz of the Centipede was still on guard waiting for news from the inside.

The keen eyes of the Boy Shadower caught sight of the Cuban, and in a moment he was shadowing him.

By and by a man came out of the house and walked away.

In an instant the Cuban left his hiding-place and touched the person on the arm. It happened to be one of the doctors.

"How is the old gentleman now?" Billy heard the captain ask.

"A little better," was the reply. "We are determined to keep life in him until they find the boy."

Captain Ortiz made an effort to seem unconcerned, but his countenance betrayed his excitement.

He did not see the little figure that hugged one of the trees on the sidewalk.

"Confound the doctors! they are ready to do anything," he snarled, as he passed the boy beagle. "Going to keep life in him till they find the boy, are they? We'll see about that."

When he started off he had a figure at his heels, but not for long.

A form flitted past Billy Winks, going toward the house, and the boy turned back.

"What's up now, Sloper?" queried Billy, eying the man whom he followed. "Are you, too, going in search of information, and when you have obtained it will you take it to your pard?"

Reck Sloper, also disguised, walked to within a few feet of the Gregg residence when he took up a position convenient for watching.

Of course he was watched by the boy detective, who, after awhile slipped to the side door and was admitted.

By and by Billy Winks came out at the front and walked toward Sloper.

Just as he expected, he was seized by the man on watch, who asked in eager tones:

"Is he dead yet?"

Billy Winks turned upon the inquirer with a comical leer.

"What is it to you whether he lives or dies?" he asked.

"I'm interested in the old gentleman because I've had some pleasant talks with him in the Park," he managed to say.

"Oh, that's why, is it? Well, he's apt to drop off in a few hours. Why don't you go in and see him?"

Sloper seemed to demur to this and looked away.

"They haven't found the boy yet," Billy informed.

"What boy?" innocently asked the sleek rascal.

"Why, Tom, his grandson; but I guess he'll turn up after the funeral."

"Likely," assented the uneasy Sloper, at the same time trying to get away without exciting suspicion.

For some little time the two walked along together, when Sloper, suddenly remembering that he had business in another part of the city, separated himself from the Boy Shadower and was gone.

Billy had hard work following Sloper, but managed to track him to a certain house which he quickly discovered had an addition, with a low-down roof. This roof he was not long in mounting.

Billy had barely reached the new point of observation when he saw a light straight ahead, and the next moment he saw Sloper carrying a match in one hand.

Sloper lighted the gas and took a chair, as if to wait for some one.

He did not have to wait very long for the door opened and Simon Slyboots came into view.

Billy now listened intently, and while he did so his keen eyes were not idle.

"Well, how is he?" asked Slyboots.

"Nearly gone. I saw a boy who came out of the house with the latest news."

"He ought to have known something."

"I think he told the truth."

A gleam of victory came into Simon's eyes.

"We're sure of the ten thousand anyhow," he said. "You see, Sloper, we've got part of it already and of course have had a time with it. When we have our hands on the captain's purse-strings we'll make the rest of it fly and will feather our nest in great shape."

"Unless Mother Magog gets her dander up and lets the cat out of the bag."

"There you go again. Don't you know that I hold a club over her head and at the first sign of her opening her mouth, out comes what I know about her son and shut goes that mouth you may be sure."

"I hope so. I haven't seen old Timothy for some days, but I shouldn't be surprised if he turned up."

"Sloper, you have no right to be in a game of this sort and have such foolish fears," cried Simon.

"Confound it, I'm built that way."

Simon seemed to eye his companion with maliciousness for a moment and Billy Winks saw that Sloper was actually afraid of him.

"Do you think there's any danger of the detectives ever discovering anything?" asked Reck.

"Would I be Simon Slyboots if there was?" was the quick retort. "Do you think I would play for half a million—for mind you we don't intend to stop till we have had a finger on every dollar of it—if I hadn't looked ahead far enough to see the outcome? I know what these man-hunters are and how to treat them. I've had to deal with them before this and I know them thoroughly. Catch Simon Slyboots napping, especially with such a plum at stake!"

For a little while Sloper seemed reassured and his courage came back.

The two men smoked and discussed the game.

but not a word was uttered that gave Billy Winks the slightest clew to Tom Wagner's whereabouts.

"I'm off!" suddenly announced Simon.

Sloper looked at him but said nothing.

"We'll want to see the papers to-morrow," he went on. "Great excitement! Young heir missing—kidnapped, and held for ransom! That will be the story told by the newspapers. They won't say one word about the finding of the boy, nor of the arrest of his kidnappers. That they will leave for another chapter, ha, ha!"

Simon threw his cigar into a corner and went toward the door.

Pausing there, he looked back at Sloper and eyed him for a moment, but did not speak. Then he shut the door and left his friend alone.

"Now's my time," decided Billy Winks. "Simon is the man I am to follow."

He scrambled from the roof and hurried to the front of the building, but as he emerged from the alley he saw a man step into a cab and drive off.

"There's many a slip," said Billy, laughing in spite of the misfortune. "I'll have to go back and play on Reck Sloper's fears."

Just then a hand fell heavily upon his shoulder and he looked up.

A man he had seen but twice before in his life, stood beside him.

"I've found you at last," said the man.

"Molly would like to see you."

"Molly?"

"Molly Marks, my niece."

CHAPTER IV.

MOLLY MARKS.

"I ~~won't~~ be losing much time," thought the boy detective, as he signified his willingness to accompany the man. "So Molly wants to see me? I wonder what is up now?"

He followed the man, and halted at last at a door, which they had reached by climbing two flights of dark stairs.

"Did you find him?" cried a girlish voice the moment the door opened.

"You shall see for yourself," and Billy was led into a little room, where he stood face to face with a fair-faced creature, whose face lit up with joy the moment he was seen.

"He found me by accident, for I don't know why we should meet just where we did," the boy detective explained.

"I'll tell you some other time," replied the man. "It wasn't so much of an accident as you seem to imagine. But, here he is, Molly, and I turn him over to you," and the speaker stepped into another room, leaving Billy and the girl together.

Molly Marks was one of the thousands who who work with the needle for a living in the great metropolis. She had not toiled hard enough to take all the glow from her cheeks, nor the gleam from her bewitching eyes: but she worked hard, nevertheless, and was counted one of the best stitchers on the street.

"Maybe you will think this visit time lost," said Molly, with a smile. "But I have had Uncle Josh looking for you these three days, and to think that, sharp as he is, he could not find you."

"I haven't tried to keep out of his way. He couldn't find me, that's all."

"The other day I came across a man whose presence strangely thrilled me," continued Molly. "I can't tell you why, only I know that the moment his eyes fell upon me I started and almost let my bundle fall. It was on Broadway, which you know I have to cross on my way to the shop. Well, he was sauntering down the street, talking confidentially to another man, but I didn't pay much attention to the companion. I had to look at Captain Ortiz."

"At Captain Ortiz?" cried the young shadower.

"Yes, for I accidentally discovered that to be his name," answered Molly Marks. "I tell you, he thrilled me as I was never thrilled before, and I almost forgot my business for looking at him."

"But why should he interest you?"

Molly glanced toward the door, and then unlocked a drawer in a little stand at which she sat.

Her hand took out a package of papers which she untied and selected from the middle of the lot a letter, which she handed to Billy Winks.

"Read that," she said at the same time.

The youthful detective drew the letter from the old-time envelope and began to read.

"I don't think I ought to read this; it is somebody's love-letter."

"Don't let that stop you. You will find there the name of Captain Ortiz."

"I have reached it already," said Billy, without looking up.

"That letter was written by my father to my mother during their courtship, which of course was some years ago. Father was lost somewhere in the West Indies, from whence that very letter came, and, by the way, it was written from Cuba. Three years after my birth he was lost. They say the ship foundered in a storm, but you see that at one time father incurred the undying hatred of one Captain Ortiz."

"The same man you encountered on the street?"

"I am sure it is the same one. Now for letter number two."

Molly went back to the packet and drew forth another letter, which she also handed to the young ferret.

"Why, this is from Captain Ortiz himself," exclaimed Billy Winks.

"Yes. He writes mother that the ship was lost in a storm, and that my father, who was captain, perished with the crew."

Billy read to the end of the Cuban's letter, and then looked up into Molly's eyes.

"I want this man to confess the truth!" she cried.

"I want him to tell all about the death of my father. I have heard rumors of a duel; I have been told that the Fleetwing was burned at sea, and not ingulfed by a storm. So you see there are two stories out—one by this Captain Ortiz and another by those who ought to know just as much. I have no money to employ any one to hunt up this mystery, and if I had not seen this very man on the streets of New York, the probability is that I would have left these letters in the stand. Mind you, I never saw this man till the other day; but the moment I caught his eye—of course he didn't know me—I knew I stood face to face with the man who had something to do with my father's death. That blow killed my mother, and threw me upon the charity of Uncle Josh, who is peculiar, and whom I now support with the needle."

Molly ceased and Billy's eyes wandered back to the letters. He recalled the case of old man Gregg dying at home, of Tom Wagner lost somewhere in the coils of a plot, at the head of which was this very Captain Ortiz; and when he brought his hand down upon the work-stand, with an emphasis which startled the girl, he said something that brought color to his cheeks.

"A bigger rascal than this man Captain Ortiz does not exist!" he exclaimed. "I am going to run him down, and those with whom he has united his fortunes. The man mentioned in your father's letter and the one who wrote to your mother are one and the same. You saw the right man, Molly. You stood face to face with Captain Ortiz, of the Centipede, a Cuban serpent and a scoundrelly villain!"

Molly Marks took back the two letters and restored them to the pack.

"Then you have seen him?" she said.

"Haven't I, though? Didn't I see him on the lookout this very night, watching for death to come to an old man whose fortune is in the scales? I know Captain Ortiz and those letters will make me stick to his trail till I have unmasked him."

"I won't know how to thank you," cried Molly.

"I won't take even that for my services for I will be doing justice a service and that will be reward enough."

"He is a dangerous man for his eyes are as keen as a hawk's and he has a way that marks him a polished rascal."

"Like a good many others who come from Cuba. He has two precious villains in his employ and from what I know already, they are playing about the coolest game that was ever played in New York. I have had dealings with some big scoundrels, but I guess Captain Ortiz and his tools are the biggest of them all."

Billy Winks again promised Molly to be careful while at work and quitted the humble house with new ideas in his head.

"I always did want to be of some service to Molly and now I can help her. She's one of the girls that wear, and somehow or other whenever I look into her face, I seem to see new beauty there. I never guessed that Captain Ortiz was in any way connected with her life, but he is and in a dark manner, at that."

It was not long before the boy detective stood on a certain street looking at a man who was walking slowly toward the river.

"That is the renowned captain now," said he.

"That is Captain Ortiz of the Centipede."

All at once the man watched turned and came

toward him, and Billy, seeing that he could not avoid being seen, stood his ground and waited for the collision.

The master of the Centipede came on until he had reached a spot within ten feet of the boy when he suddenly jerked a letter from his pocket and deposited it in a letter-box.

At the same time a bit of paper fluttered to the ground and was not missed by him when he walked off.

Scarcely was his back turned when the boy detective pounced, eagle-like, upon the paper.

Half a minute later he was leaning toward the light in a window and his eye was reading the following:

"MY DEAR CAPTAIN:—Everything is going O. K. I have the fly in the web and there is no escape. From what I hear, death, the old destroyer is doing his work in the big house on the avenue. I will occupy No. 110 a few days longer when I will move out. Violet is the serpent I have on guard. You may have heard of her. We call her Violet, the Death-Flower. Will see you to-morrow and when the time comes will have proofs of death. Bury this, of course."

"S. S."

Twice did Billy Winks read this terribly suggestive letter in the light that emanated from the window.

It thrilled him for it could have but one meaning and that was that Tom Wagner was in the clutches of the man who wrote it.

When Billy turned his attention to Captain Ortiz that person was gone, but the shadower had the tell-tale letter which might be of service to him in the future.

He was about to quit the vicinity when a figure came gliding back, and the boy ferret dodged into a doorway.

Captain Ortiz was returning, looking at the ground.

"He has missed his letter," said Billy Winks to himself.

Sure enough, the captain of the Centipede walked to the letter-box under which he prospected with the greatest care and at last turned away disappointed.

"You ought to look in my pocket, captain," mused Billy with a grin that broadened on his face. "You should have taken Simon's advice and burned the letter. If I am not mistaken, it will rise to plague you one of these days."

Not finding that which he looked for, Captain Ortiz turned away and this time was followed by the Boy Shadower. He proceeded to the wharf where he stood solitary a few moments and then, as if deeming everything snug on board his ship, wheeled and started back.

Of course Billy Winks followed, but if he could have foreseen the outcome of his adventure, he might have followed with added caution.

He was tracking one of the shrewdest and coolest men he had ever dealt with.

CHAPTER V.

A TERRIBLE ORDEAL.

THE young shadower kept Captain Ortiz in sight and when he saw him turn down a darkened street and at last run up the steps of a very common-looking house he was almost sure he had made a strike.

He was certain that the vessel lying in the harbor was not the only haunt the Cuban had, that he was domiciled on shore as permanently as in his own ship, and that he would find him, when not on the vessel, in the city and probably in the very house to which he had tracked him.

It was not Billy Winks's intention to enter the house and disturb Captain Ortiz at anything he might be doing within its walls. There was danger in such proceedings and he was not the person to unnecessarily run his neck into trouble.

While he watched the house, a man came out, but he did not look much like the person he had just tracked.

When he started off Billy Winks debated in his mind what to do and when he started after him it was with the intention of following him a short distance to get at his identity if possible.

The truth is the man was Captain Ortiz himself and the boy detective was to make this discovery in no pleasant manner.

Billy was turning a corner when he was seized and pulled toward the person who had captured him.

"The arch fiend himself!" he exclaimed, looking up into the man's face.

"Tracking me, were you?" answered the captor and the next moment Billy felt the grip sink into his flesh and he was on his way to the river which was not many squares distant.

Captain Ortiz said nothing till he was very near the wharves when, looking down into the boy's face, he remarked:

"Do you hunt people very often? Aren't you one of these young ferrets I hear about?"

Billy smiled.

"You may have of me whatever opinion you please," he said.

"Then, I call you a rascally young spy who was prying into business not your own when caught. My boat will be here in a moment. It is about the hour. Ah, here it is!"

At this moment the boy ferret saw a boat come in sight and Captain Ortiz forced him to the edge of the pier.

Billy drew back, making a sudden and desperate effort to release himself from the grip that encircled him, but without avail, and he was tumbled down into the captain's gig without much ceremony and in another instant was on his way to the Cuban's vessel.

He could almost guess how his adventure was going to end and resolved to betray nothing, he fell back in the boat and saw himself closely regarded by the captain.

He saw the boat pulled alongside a trim-looking vessel and he was taken on board and guided to a cabin where he was left alone a few moments.

He thought suddenly of the letter he had found, and quick as a flash he pulled it forth and rolling it into a small compass, swallowed it just as the door opened and Captain Ortiz came back with a grin of triumph on his face.

In another moment he would have been detected in the act.

Captain Ortiz looked like his old self and Billy could not avoid noticing how black the eyes were and how handsome he was in every particular.

"Why did you follow me?" queried the captain of the Centipede, looking Billy Winks in the face while he took a seat at a table and across the way from his young prisoner.

"How do you know I was?"

"Come, you can't fool me! I have been followed before."

"Very well, then. If you know I was on your track I need not try to deny it."

"You make a business of following people, don't you?"

No answer.

Captain Ortiz turned toward the door and struck the table with his hand.

The next moment the door opened and a face of a cast decidedly Cuban made its appearance.

"Is the Princess in good humor, Blanco?" asked the captain.

"She is all right, senor."

"Fetch her in."

The head vanished and the door was shut.

Instead of turning again to the boy captive, the Cuban captain rolled a cigarette and lit it without emotion.

At the end of a minute silken footsteps were heard, and the door opened once more.

Billy Winks, who was watching the door at the time, fell back with a cry he could not restrain.

Blanco had come back, but he was not alone.

On the contrary, he was accompanied by a handsome jaguar that purred at his legs like a kitten.

"Come, Princess," said Captain Ortiz, snapping his fingers, at which sound the animal approached and showed her teeth.

"Here, this is a young spy from the gutters," he went on, looking toward Billy who had not for moment taken his eyes from the jaguar.

"What, are you going to turn me over to that beast?" cried the boy, the situation forcing the words from his mouth.

"Why not? You have followed me, and while Princess has you in charge, you won't get to ply your calling."

Blanco now withdrew, leaving Captain Ortiz, the animal and Billy Winks in the cabin.

The jaguar was licking her master's dark hand, and the boy detective was looking at her beautiful skin, but not without feelings of fear.

"Confess to everything," suddenly said Captain Ortiz. "Why were you watching me?"

The young ferret of the streets did not speak.

All at once the Cuban captain threw the jaguar from him, and she crouched on the floor with a long whine.

At the same moment Billy Winks sprang from his chair and drew back.

He was armed with nothing but a knife, the blade of which was barely long enough to penetrate the sleek hide of the beast.

Still he drew it forth and opened the blade.

"Fool!" laughed Captain Ortiz. "You can't kill a jaguar with a jack-knife."

There was more truth in these words than Billy Winks realized, but he did not abate his resolution, and placing himself on the defensive

while he eyed the beast, he awaited the spring which he felt was near at hand.

"What, are you going to mar the skin of Princess with that blade? Throw that knife across the cabin!"

Instead of obeying this command, Billy only grasped the knife the more firmly and looked from the animal to the Cuban captain.

Suddenly Captain Ortiz sprang to his feet and let out a harsh Spanish oath.

"Eye him, Princess!" he said, to the crouching terror on the floor. "At the snap of my finger you will spring forward and 'kiss' him!"

The jaguar seemed to understand every word.

"You young spy, you have been on my trail longer than this day," continued the enraged Cuban. "You are in the employ of the police of New York, and they are watching me through your keen eyes."

"It is not true. I am not serving the police at all. When I watch any one it is on my own hook."

"A confession! You were watching me?"

Billy was silent.

"Now, what were you after? Why were you following me under the lamps of your city?"

"I had a right to," and the lips of the boy closed behind the last words in a manner which must have told the captain that he would go no further, jaguar or no jaguar.

Meantime the animal was creeping forward eager to get at the boy ferret.

She was covering, inch by inch, the ship's floor, slipping over it without the slightest noise and all the time with her eyeballs riveted upon her chosen victim.

Billy Winks had never been in such a situation before. He had had narrow escapes and had been in close situations, but never had he faced a huge cat like the one crouching before him.

Captain Ortiz showed no mercy in look or gesture. He was a Cuban to the backbone, and Billy could see that he would let the jaguar rend him in pieces.

In backing off the boy detective reached a quaint old-fashioned cupboard set in the wall, the door of which was open.

A glance showed him half a dozen revolvers so arranged on the shelves as to be ready for instant use.

Captain Ortiz seemed to divine the boy's intentions, for all at once he cried out to him to come forward, at the same time applying an epithet calculated to nettle his courage.

But Billy Winks, driven to the wall by the menace of tooth and claw, whirled suddenly toward the cupboard and seized one of the nearest six-shooters.

Clutching the weapon firmly, the undaunted Billy faced the fierce brute, waiting for the signal from her equally vicious master, and leveled the weapon at her head.

The jaguar showed her teeth and whined.

"Princess is quicker than eye and finger," derisively laughed the Cuban captain, and at the same time he snapped his fingers.

Quick as a flash, up leaped the spotted terror, and straight at the boy detective's throat!

She was clear of the floor when the cabin rung with a wild report, and there succeeded a groan almost human as the beautiful pet fell back.

The white smoke lifted. Captain Ortiz stood like one petrified on the spot; Billy Winks, breathless, leaned forward with the smoking revolver in his hand and—

The jaguar lay on the floor, shot through the brain!

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE CENTIPEDE'S HOLD.

THE tigerish rage of Captain Ortiz at the death of his pet knew no bounds.

For a moment he sat spellbound in his chair, glaring at the boy detective, and Billy fully expected to see him leap at him with as much impulsiveness as the jaguar had done.

The animal had not moved since falling. The shot had been decisive, and the terror of the tropics was dead at her master's feet.

The sound of the shot brought a dark face to the door and the boy once more saw the face of Blanco.

The Cuban's man only waited for orders and stood ready to carry them out no matter what they might be.

This tableau lasted a full minute when the hand of the Cuban captain came down upon the table and he cried:

"You have killed the best friend Captain Ortiz ever had. You shall pay dearly for this murder!"

"One ought to be permitted to defend one's

life," was the answer. "The beast was leaping at my throat when I fired and I saw my life at stake."

Captain Ortiz arose and faced the young ferret.

"Come in, Blanco," he said, for he had caught sight of the head at the door.

The door opened and Blanco stood in the room.

"Seize that young rascal!" said Ortiz.

Blanco stepped forward, but in an instant he was covered by the same weapon that had taken the life of the jaguar.

"I will kill you if you attempt any violence," the boy said coolly. "Captain Ortiz, as he calls himself, had no right to bring me to this vessel and I will act as I see fit. Stand your distance."

Blanco looked at the captain but did not move.

"Furies! are you afraid of a boy?" yelled the infuriated man, beating the table with his fist.

Blanco bit his lip and made ready for a spring, pistol or no pistol.

The next moment he came at Billy Winks, and when the trigger was pressed no report followed.

"Ha, ha! I took the chances," laughed the Cuban captain. "One of the revolvers was sparingly loaded, and I thought you had it in your hand. The only loaded chamber killed Princess, and now it is useless."

Billy felt like throwing the pistol away for he was in Blanco's grip, and the hand of the Cuban slave was sinking, as it seemed, to the bone.

"Hold him well, Blanco, my boy. You shall take the place of Princess as far as you can."

Billy could only look at the man who had spoken and wonder what would happen next.

"Take him below to the cage till he is wanted," continued Captain Ortiz and without being permitted to have another word, the boy ferret was marched off under escort of Blanco, and in a little while he found himself in a small room where he could hear the swish of waters as the vessels rocked on the tide.

The place was dark enough at first, but after awhile he discovered a bit of light and watched it as the beams stole across the floor, showing him a room without furniture, and forbidding enough to suggest a prison-house of death.

Billy Winks threw himself upon the cot that showed up in one corner, and thought over the sudden change in his fortunes.

He was in the hold of Captain Ortiz's ship and no person outside of its tenants knew aught of his situation.

What had become of Tom Wagner the victim of the plot, and was old man Gregg dead?

These thoughts were enough to almost still the heart of the courageous boy, but one thing he was sure of, and that was that the jaguar would never leap at another throat.

He had slain the beast of the tropics, and, as a matter of course, expected to feel the vengeance of her master.

Meantime Captain Ortiz had gone back to the city, leaving Billy Winks guarded by the shrewd Blanco who was ready to carry out any commands that might be issued.

Captain Ortiz was anxious to know what had taken place since he was last in the metropolis, and not long after his arrival he reached the vicinity of Napoleon Gregg's house.

The place was as silent as the grave, and he took it for granted that the end had come, and that the rich old man was dead.

He remained on the watch till the front door opened and a man came out.

Approaching this person cautiously, the captain of the Centipede was about to inquire after Gregg's health when the person turned upon him, and he fell back with a cry.

It was Simon Slyboots!

"Well, you're the coolest man I ever saw," cried Captain Ortiz. "You haven't been inside of that house, I hope?"

"Why not?" grinned the other.

"Of course, I don't object, but you ought to be very careful."

"Who is more so? I am serving you and I know what I'm about?"

Captain Ortiz said no more for a spell, during which the two men walked together.

In a little while they entered a certain place where they found themselves secluded, when the captain leaned forward and clutched Simon's arm.

"How is he?" he asked.

"About the same. He has started the whole police force on hunt of the boy, and says he will live till Tom is found."

Captain Ortiz drew off and looked at Simon Slyboots.

"Well, are you going to let the boy be found?"

"I guess not."

"Of course not."

"I understand that he is to be lost forever."

"Certainly. Nothing comes to you if he is found."

A curious smile overspread the face of Simon Slyboots.

"You know what you are doing, I'm sure you do," the captain went on. "By the way, did you ever hear of a boy detective who has the faculty of hitting on puzzles and solving them?"

"I should say I have heard of him," and Simon laughed outright. "Have you run across him, captain?"

There was no reply for a moment, but the face of the Cuban captain was a study.

"They call him Billy, don't they?" Simon went on. "I have had him on my trail for some time, but I manage to give him the slip so easily that he hasn't even bothered me any of late."

"I guess he won't bother any one any more," said the captain significantly.

By and by Simon's hand stole up over the edge of the table at which they sat and he said:

"You got my letter, captain?"

"Yes."

"Did it suit?"

"It was all right. You said in it that when we met again you would have proofs of death."

Simon Slyboots took from under his coat a small box which he opened cautiously.

The moment the Cuban captain looked into the box he fell back and stared at the plotter.

"Is that proof enough?" grinned Simon.

"You know I couldn't bring the whole body and I thought I would fetch you a bit—enough to let you know that I carry out my parts of the programmes."

The object that had chased the color from Captain Ortiz's face was a human hand which lay in the box and he was almost willing to swear that it was the hand of a young person.

"Don't you think," he said in a whisper, "that if the old man had proof of the boy's death he wouldn't last much longer himself?"

"I shouldn't be surprised."

"Then, why don't you furnish the proof?"

"That wasn't in my part of the bargain."

Captain Ortiz must have thought of Mother Magog's words when he looked at Simon Slyboots. He was a cool fellow and knew how to play a deep game for himself.

"I am aware that it wasn't exactly in the bargain, but you might do that much without extra pay."

In an instant Simon seemed to get angry.

"You want us to take every risk," said he, "while you sit back and rake in the big stakes."

"I expect nothing of the kind. I am willing to pay for every service I get out of you and Sloper."

"That's a horse of another color."

"I want the proof of the boy's death to reach Old Man Gregg, and in the form of a shock, too."

"Well, that will be worth two thousand extra."

The figures seemed to take Captain Ortiz's breath, but he did not betray himself.

"I consent," he said. "I will pay the price you name for the extra service. The money will be paid when the old man closes his accounts with mortality."

Simon nodded and got up.

"You seem to have the entree to the house," remarked Ortiz. "How did you get it?"

"Ask no questions and get no lies. I tell you I am risking my precious neck every time I enter that house, for it is watched by the police, and Napoleon Gregg's money has employed the best detectives in Gotham."

"But you are shrewder than all, eh, Simon?"

"Catch a weasel asleep!" laughed the great rascal, and in a minute they were again on the sidewalk, and some distance from the place of consultation they separated and went different ways.

"This is only the beginning," muttered Simon, looking after the Cuban. "You won't have a dollar of the pile when we get through with you. I know a good thing when I see it."

CHAPTER VII.

THE NOTE UNDER THE DOOR.

MOTHER MAGOG had a son who had been criminal in some of his acts and a full knowledge of this was the "club" which Simon Slyboots had for some time been holding over the woman's head.

The reader will remember that she told Captain Ortiz that she feared the sharp, and so she did, for he had threatened to expose her boy and get him into serious trouble.

Soon after his interview with Captain Ortiz, Simon made his way to Mother Magog's house and was met at the door by the giantess.

Her start when she saw who her visitor was enough to confirm her statement that she actually feared him when she was strong enough to hurl him against the wall and choke him to death.

Simon slid into the house without the semblance of invitation and immediately asked for "Jim."

Mother Magog, who loved her son despite his character, told the rascal that she did not know where he was at that time, whereupon Simon smiled one of his malicious smiles and hinted that it would be best for Jim to be about when he was wanted.

Mother Magog sat and eyed the man, wondering what would be his next word, and he was for some time silent.

"Tell Jim I want to see him when he comes home and say it in such a way that he will know that it will not do to disobey the summons."

The woman started and seemed to shudder.

"Will he get into trouble if he obeys?" she asked.

"He will if he doesn't," was the quick retort.

"Why can't you leave Jim alone, Simon Slyboots?"

The villain laughed.

"I know that you happen to know something about Jim's past, but I don't see why you should all the time hold it over our heads like a club. Let the boy have a moment's peace; give him a chance to be an honest man."

"Who? Jim?" grinned Simon. "I'd like to see him be that even if he tried. What's bred in the bone—"

He did not get to complete his sentence, for like a tigress the woman sprung up and her face was almost dark.

"That will do! You sha'n't assault the memory of my husband, for that was what you were about to do. He was honest, and if it hadn't been for men of your stamp, Jim wouldn't have gone astray, and you know it."

He looked at her towering above him like a mountain, and saw that her hands were clinched and that fire was flying from the depths of her eyes.

Mother Magog glanced toward a door across the room, and Simon feared that some ally was within call. But what would a woman of her strength want with an ally?

"Well, do just what you like, but mind you, you take the consequences," he went on. "I want Jim, and he will do well by calling on me as soon as possible."

Mother Magog drew back and again looked toward the door.

"Who's in that room?" asked Simon.

The next moment the door flew open and a young man, whose face bore a hunted look, came forward.

It was Jim himself.

"Here you are, eh?" said Simon. "Been in the house all the time, and your mother would never have told you to come forth."

There was no reply for a little while, and Jim, standing in the middle of the room, looked at Simon Slyboots with a strange glare.

"You want to see me," he said at last. "What is your business with me?"

"This is not the place for business of the nature I want to transact."

"You will proceed, for by Heavens! mother and I understand one another, and whatever you have to say to me you will spit it out here or keep still."

For a moment the oily rascal seemed to draw within himself, but the young man continued:

"Say it here, I tell you. I will listen to you nowhere else."

At the same time Mother Magog planted herself more firmly on the floor and smiled at Jim.

"You told me the other day that you wanted a job," said Simon. "I have found a place for you, and one that will pay big wages for little service."

"Eh?"

"I can get you inside one of the finest houses in the city and where an old man needs a little care while he is dying."

Mother Magog started.

"Do you mean Napoleon Gregg?" she asked.

Simon Slyboots looked at her with a sudden stare.

"What do you know about that man?" he exclaimed.

"Never mind; go on with your talk to Jim."

"Well, I can get you that job," continued

Simon. "It won't cost you much labor. All you have to do is to report to me every few hours the progress of the old man's disease and follow out a few other instructions which you may receive from time to time."

Jim threw a swift glance toward his mother.

"I will take the job," said he. "I won't run any risk, will I?"

"None whatever. You will use your eyes and deliver a certain letter which you will find under the door—deliver it to Napoleon Gregg and to no one else."

"How do you know I can get the place?"

"I have already secured it for you."

"You are very kind. When am I to take it?"

"As soon as possible. I have just come from the house and they have agreed to accept the nurse I am to send."

As Simon Slyboots rose to go, the soft step of Jim's mother approached him and when he looked back he saw her eying him intently.

"Jim is going to Napoleon Gregg's house," said she. "He will serve you as far as he can in the interests of justice; but he shall commit no crime for you."

"I haven't asked him to commit one," was the reply. "All he has to do is to deliver a letter to the old man himself. That's not very much, is it?"

Simon laid his hand on the knob and opened the door.

If he had looked at Jim he would have seen a singular expression on the face of that young man who was eying him like a hawk.

An hour later Jim presented himself at the door of the Gregg mansion and was admitted.

When he said that he was the nurse sent by Simon Slyboots he was placed on duty and for the first time looked into the face of Napoleon Gregg, Tom Wagner's grandfather.

For some time Jim watched the dying man who was propped up in bed with pillows, and when he thought him asleep, he stole from the room and at a certain hour went into the front hall.

He discovered a bit of paper protruding from beneath the front door, and taking it in his hand, knew that he had the identical note which he was to hand to the old man.

Jim, the criminal, felt his fingers tremble while he held the paper. He was alone and the old house was quiet.

He went back to the little parlor near the old man's chamber and closely eyed his find.

What did that letter contain?

He stood there undecided, thinking, no doubt, of the hold Simon Slyboots had on him, and of his mother's last words.

A hundred times did the young man turn the sealed note in his hand, and more than once he walked toward the door, only to fall back with a shiver.

"I don't believe it can kill him," suddenly said Jim. "It is something which Simon wants him to see all by himself, and that is why I was to deliver it to him alone."

Jim left the room and went over to where old Gregg lay.

He opened the door and stole into the room on tip-toe.

The patient had fallen into a doze, and he stood and looked at him some time.

All at once the eyes opened and were fixed upon Jim.

"What is it?" asked Napoleon Gregg. "You have a letter for me. It is from Tom!"

If Jim had tried to hide the note he would have been unsuccessful, for the keen eyes of old Gregg had already discovered it, and advancing across the room, he placed it in the wrinkled hands.

Napoleon Gregg's eyes lit up with intense excitement.

Jim was alone with him.

"Open it for me," said the old man. "It is from Tom, and I haven't strength enough to break the seal."

Jim took the letter and opened it.

"Hand it here!" cried the dying man. "You must not read it first."

But Mother Magog's son did not heed the last injunction.

He opened the paper, and in an instant his face lost color and he looked toward Napoleon Gregg.

"You can't see this," he said.

"I must! I must! It is news from Tom, and—"

"It is as cool a plot as was ever hatched in the brain of man," was the answer.

Napoleon Gregg held out his hands imploringly, but Jim drew back with the letter.

"Give it to me! If you don't, you are in the plot yourself."

The old man fell forward, his voice ringing through the house like a shriek.

Jim caught him and forced him back.

Tom Wagner's grandfather fell back among the pillows like a lifeless person, and when Jim saw that he was unconscious, if not dead, he stooped and hid the letter in his bosom.

"I guess I am as well armed as you are, Simon Slyboots," he said to himself. "Now, if I could only see the boy detective mother has told me about, there would be a turning of the tide."

Mother Magog's son was destined to see Billy Winks, and that when he was not looking for him.

CHAPTER VIII.

BILLY WINKS TURNS UP.

NAPOLEON GREGG never recovered from the shock of the letter which Jim refused to let him see.

In less than an hour he was dead, and the doctors who were called in said that he died suddenly because of a shock of some kind; but Mother Magog's son did not proceed to enlighten them.

When he was sure Tom Wagner's grandfather was dead, he stole from the house and crept down the streets.

He did not know for some time that he was watched, but all at once he became aware that this was so, and he found himself in the grip of Simon Slyboots.

This time Simon was not alone, but was in company with Sloper, and the three adjourned to a room inhabited by Simon at odd times, and there Jim was asked to tell what he knew about the old man's death.

Mother Magog's son said he had carried the letter to old Gregg, that he had shown it to the dying man, who, when he had read it, fell back unconscious, and in that condition died an hour or so later.

"You saved the letter for me?" said Simon, putting out his hand.

"I destroyed it."

In an instant the eagle eyes of the sharper were riveted upon the young man, and the scrutiny he had to undergo was something terrible.

But Jim had prepared for the ordeal, and when it was over mentally congratulated himself and thought that he was a consummate actor.

"I guess you'll do," said Simon, with a smile.

Jim was dismissed at last, and when on the street again did not stop until he was under his mother's roof.

All this time he had kept the fatal letter concealed, and was wondering where Billy Winks was.

Mother Magog, who knew a good deal about the boy detective, told her son where he might find the young shadower, and, intent on finding Billy, Jim started off.

If he had gone to the Centipede lying in the harbor he might have found the object of his search, but he never thought of looking on the water for the boy.

All at once—it was daylight now—Jim was stopped by an odd-looking man who gazed up into his face, and said:

"You're Mother Magog's boy, aren't you?"

Jim did not know what to say, but finally admitted that he bore that relation to the famous woman.

"They call me Timothy Turk, and I am related to Tom Wagner, who has been kidnapped."

"Oh," said Jim, "I am glad to see you, Mr. Turk; but I can't stop now, for I've got a job on hand, and it can't be overlooked."

"It can't, eh?" and the old man grinned. "I have a job, too; one of looking up Tom, but I don't know just how it will end."

In another moment Jim felt the speaker's hand on his arm, and he was being dragged toward the harbor.

"Do you see that little ship lying out yonder?" continued Tom Wagner's relative, pointing toward the Centipede which was plainly visible from where they had stopped.

"I'd be blind if I didn't," said Jim.

"Well, she belongs to Captain Ortiz and came up from Cuba some days ago. There's nothing startling in that, ha? No? Well, you don't know that Captain Ortiz will be the heir if Tom never turns up."

"Captain Ortiz, the Cuban?"

"That's what."

"What relation to Napoleon Gregg was he?"

"None, the serpent! but he knew enough to play a good hand some years ago when Napoleon Gregg was looking for a wife and the will says that, in case of the boy's death, Captain Jarillo comes in next."

"But you were just now talking about Captain Ortiz?"

"I'm talking 'bout him yet, though I call him by another name sometimes as it suits me to. As I was saying, that ship out yonder is his, and I was lying hereabouts last night when a very strange thing happened."

Jim was all attention now and was looking at the Centipede with increasing curiosity.

"I saw a man whom I at once knew was Captain Ortiz come down here with a boy who seemed to be a prisoner from the way he was held by the villain. They went out to the ship in a boat which seemed to come from her to meet them here."

"A boy, Mr. Turk?"

"A boy, and he was a sharp-looking boy, at that. I fancy he had been captured somewhere by the captain and he was taking him to the Centipede where he would be safe and could not get to watch him any more."

In an instant a thought of Billy Winks crossed Jim's mind.

"What was the boy like?" he asked, with eagerness.

Timothy Turk described the boy in as few words as he could and Jim's heart seemed to stand still.

"It must have been Billy, the very boy I'm looking for!" he said to himself. "If he went out yonder with Captain Ortiz and as a prisoner, he is out there yet."

Jim eyed the Centipede and tried to form a plan for getting out to her.

Meantime Timothy Turk was watching him as though he would read his very thoughts.

"I don't think the boy was a prisoner," he said at last. "I can't stop to think of such things now but must go about my business."

He tore himself from the old man's grip and started off.

Timothy Turk turned and watched him out of sight when he burst into an immoderate fit of laughter which reached the ears of a man who was on the lookout and who followed the old gentleman when he walked off.

Jim gave up his hunt for Billy Winks at last and went home.

The day passed and he did not venture into the street until nightfall when he slipped down stairs and glided out among the lights.

He lounged into a cheap eating-house which he sometimes visited when he had some small change in his pocket and on taking a seat at one of the tables picked up the latest edition of an afternoon paper.

Now a reference to Napoleon Gregg was the last thing Jim expected to find in that paper; but he was suddenly disturbed by the heading of a short article and in a second he was reading as follows:

"A NEW HEIR TURNS UP.

"Before Napoleon Gregg of M— avenue is buried an heir turns up, and unless the missing boy is found, or if he is found dead, this new heir will glide into one of the snuggest fortunes in this city. One of the clauses of the Gregg will makes one Pedron Jarillo next of kin, though, in reality, the kinship between Napoleon Gregg and Jarillo is barely traceable. The man Jarillo, who is known in certain circles as Captain Ortiz, of the ship Centipede, is here and has put in a claim to the estate conditional, of course, on the outcome of the search for the missing grandson. If Tom Wagner has disappeared for good, and this is not improbable, the Gregg estate will pass into the hands of Captain Ortiz who has the papers to prove that he is the real Pedron Jarillo, though he has been masquerading under the name of Ortiz for some years."

The reader may imagine with what feeling Jim read the startling paragraph.

He forgot to order his supper though he had entered the restaurant as ravenous as a wolf, and when he came fully to his senses, he was on the pavement with his head in a whirl.

"This beats the Jews," said Jim. "Captain Ortiz Pedron Jarillo and the next in line? I begin to see through a stone wall and when mother told me that Simon Slyboots and pard were in the captain's pay, I wondered what it all meant. But I think I see now."

Jim started off, but had not gone far when his arm was caught and he looked into the face of a boy.

"You are Jim and the very person I want to see," said the youth. "I have had a fight for liberty, but here I am to prove that I came off conqueror. They never hold Billy Winks very long—"

"What, are you Billy Winks?"

"The only Billy, Jim. But we don't want to be seen talking here. I have just escaped from the floating trap out in the harbor and there may be some one on my track."

Billy Winks drew Jim into the first hallway that presented itself and went on:

"What has happened, Jim?"

"The old man is dead."

"Napoleon Gregg?"

"Yes."

Billy Winks was silent for a moment.

"And what else has occurred?"

"The new heir has turned up."

"Captain Ortiz?"

"The captain of the Centipede."

"I thought as much. And the boy, Tom, is still missing?"

"They are all at fault."

"Jim, where is your mother?"

"At home, sir. I guess she don't fear the club as much as she did. I have armed myself. I hold a paper pistol at Simon Slyboots's head, and the moment he lifts the club I touch the trigger. See?"

The couple remained in the hallway nearly an hour, and when they slipped forth they hurried away.

Billy Winks had told the story of his escape from the Centipede; how he had managed to elude even the watchful Blanco and secure one of the ship's boats in which he had effected his escape to the city, and Jim had listened with a smile on his lips.

"They'll look for you, Billy," said Jim.

"Of course, but I will be too sharp for the whole gang."

"You will have Slyboots and Sloper after you."

"I know it. They will have to cage me or get caged themselves, and they realize what that means."

"Sing Sing, eh?"

"Yes, if not something worse than that."

A few squares from the hallway the two separated for the time being, and Billy Winks resolved to play a swift and deadly hand against the plot for Napoleon Gregg's thousands.

"They're all against me—all but Jim and Mother Magog; but I won't throw down a foolish card," he said.

CHAPTER IX.

ENTRAPPING HIMSELF.

ONE very remarkable thing astonished Captain Ortiz before he was many hours older, and that was that he was observed by nearly every person who happened to run across him.

He was the observed of every one on Broadway, and did not know what it all meant until he picked up a paper and read the paragraph that had surprised Jim in the restaurant.

"I'll go out to the vessel and see how things are there," he said, "and come back and fix myself solid, for the boy is one of those things that don't turn up, and I am the holder of the winning cards."

As no boat came to take him out to the Centipede, he had to hire his way to the vessel, and when he found himself on deck, he went below in search of Blanco.

But Blanco was not to be found, nor was the cage where he left Billy Winks occupied by the young prisoner.

Captain Ortiz stood like one thunderstruck on the threshold of the dark cage, but all at once, with a fierce oath, he ran back and burst into his own private apartments, which were fitted up without regard to cost.

In a moment he realized that he had been robbed.

Everything indicated that the thief had taken a good deal of valuable property, but here and there something of value remained.

Blanco was not to be found on board, and when he questioned one of the half drunken sailors, he learned that the Cuban had been gone some time.

Back he went to the city.

Maybe after all Blanco had finished Billy Winks before quitting the vessel.

The harbor was deep and a body could be lowered from the ship without discovery, and Blanco had every reason for making away with the Boy Shadower.

This thought somewhat calmed the captain's fears, and he found himself in the city, with his mind made up what to do.

He cared but little for the stolen articles, for was he not about to come into possession of a vast sum of money? He would soon lay hold of the Gregg estate, and never again would he sail the deep, and be Captain Ortiz of the Centipede.

He was stopped when he thought no one was near.

"Come with me. I have news," and he walked off, looking into the face of Simon Slyboots, wondering what news he could have.

Simon shut the door of his nest carefully be-

bind them, and Captain Ortiz waited for him to speak.

"When are you going to pay up?" abruptly asked the blackleg.

"When everything is done."

"What more is there to do? The grandfather is dead, the boy is not found, and the papers are speaking of you as the only heir. Seems to me the game is played out."

The two men sat face to face in the little room, and for some time Captain Ortiz looked into the eyes of the cool spider.

"Perhaps you would like to see more than the hand," said Simon. "I am prepared to furnish you with all the proof you want. Will you come with me?"

The Cuban drew back.

"I am willing to take your word, after what I have seen, but you must remember that I am not yet in possession of the estate, that I will not get it until certain weeks have passed, and the police of New York are satisfied that Tom Wagner will never bother me."

"Hang the police!" growled Simon. "Me and my part can't live on wind."

"I don't ask you to confine yourself to so slim a diet," smiled the Cuban.

"We'll take the check, then."

"Not all of it?"

"The whole amount."

Captain Ortiz glared at his man.

Simon Slyboots had crossed his legs, and was coolly looking, now at him and now at writing materials that stood on a table near at hand.

"We'll take the ten thousand," he continued. "Life is uncertain, captain, and we want our own very badly."

The captain of the Centipede moved to the table and bent over it, pen in hand.

All this time there were eyes at the window which opened on a sloping roof in the backyard.

These eyes were as keen as any in the city, and when they saw Captain Ortiz seat himself at the table they got a quick light.

Billy Winks was "on deck" as usual, and it was his figure that lay on the roof and his eyes that watched the two men in the room—the master and his man.

For several moments Captain Ortiz wrote and then tossed the paper to the watchful Simon.

Mr. Slyboots caught it up and looked it over with a good deal of care.

Without a word he put it in his pocket and turned to the Cuban.

"That counfounded boy has turned up again," he remarked.

Captain Ortiz started as though stung by a snake.

"Where is he?"

"Tracking, as usual. I have thought of curbing him just to show him that I am still in the ring; but, then, he can't do me any particular damage. You're not afraid of him, captain?"

The color of the Cuban's cheeks was answer enough.

"Simon, do you think you could be as successful dealing with this young fox as you were with the other one?" he asked.

"When did I ever fail?"

"I can't recall a failure, of course; but you must know that I don't want any spies at my heels at this stage of the game."

"Certainly not; but, captain, you see there might be some trouble connected with the netting of a shrewd young rascal who knows the whole city like this boy does—"

"I understand. I don't know who else to trust. You have furnished the other game and I don't want you to work for nothing. Would a thousand do?"

"That would only be five hundred apiece for me an' Sloper, for I would have to get him to help me."

The captain of the Centipede bit his lip, and turned once more toward the table.

He wrote a moment and handed the results of his labor to Simon Slyboots.

It was a check for three thousand dollars, and the eyes of the sharper emitted a gleam of triumph as he looked at it.

He knew he had Captain Ortiz in his power.

"We'll do what we can," he said, pocketing the check. "I don't propose to have any one at my heels nor interfering with the happiness of my friends. Yes, we'll do what we can, Sloper an' I will. You needn't fear Mother Magog. I hold a club over her head and she knows it."

"I'm aware of that, Simon."

Billy Winks did not slide from the roof until the two worthies had left the room, and when the door had closed upon their retreating

forms, he left his perch and went back to the street.

Simon Slyboots was the man he now tracked.

He followed him to a house on a very quiet street, and was so near him when he shut the door, that he heard his footsteps on the stairs in the hall.

Presently Simon was heard talking to some one, and when he came out of the house and walked away, Billy lingered and resolved to see the person inside.

Presently he slipped up to the door and knocked.

It was opened half an inch, and he caught a glimpse of a woman's face.

"What is it?" asked the person in the hall.

"The gentleman has sent me back on an errand," and Billy squeezed into the house only to be caught when across the threshold and held as in a grip of iron.

There was light enough to show him the face and figure of the woman who had captured him.

She was still young, but not beautiful. There was something soft and silken about her looks, but there was at the same time that grip which seemed to sink into his flesh to the very bone and send a chill over it.

"He sent you back, did he?" she said, looking down into Billy's face. "Young man, he never did anything of the kind. If he wanted me to have any news, or if he wanted anything, he would have come back himself. You are playing a game of your own, and this is a bad place to do anything of the sort. But what does he want?"

"He won't come back when he said he would," said Billy, boldly. "He's changed his mind, I guess."

The woman laughed.

"I thought you wanted some excuse to get inside, and what are you going to do now that you're in?"

Billy thought of the letter he had picked up under the lamp after Captain Ortiz had dropped it.

This woman was the person referred to in that letter as "Violet, the Death-Flower."

And he was in her grasp!

While he thought of these things he was dragged back into the hall and a door alongside was opened.

Billy Winks was carried into a dark room, where he was released as suddenly as he had been taken, but all was dark, and he did not know which way to go to find a door.

"This is almost as bad as the hold of the Centipede," he said to himself. "I am now in the clutches of a woman, and she knows that I have crossed the forbidden line by a lie. But there must be a door somewhere."

He started forward, with his hands in front of his face, but had not advanced half a dozen steps when his wrist was encircled by a hand that had long fingers.

"Stop! To investigate in this house is death!" said a voice in a hiss, and Billy Winks stood still, breathless, but calm.

CHAPTER X.

BILLY IN BONDAGE.

THE BOSS BOY Detective knew that once more he was in the grip of the creature whom he had mentally named Violet the Death-Flower, that it was her hand at his wrist, and that if he resisted he would, in all probability, be throttled in that chamber of darkness.

For some little time after the last words, not a sound broke the stillness of the place, and he stood still, waiting for the next move of the unseen foe.

At the end of this time he was hurried across the room and a door was opened.

This time he was ushered into a chamber not so dark as the first, nor quite light enough to distinctly show him his surroundings.

"Keep a cool head, Billy Winks," the boy said to himself. "You are in a trap of your own making, and must get out of it as best you can."

This was true. He had poked his head into danger, but his motto—"Nothing risked, nothing gained"—was one he had followed a long time, and he was not the boy to give it up because a little peril threatened.

"Sit down, please," said the woman, and Billy was dumped into a chair, up over the arms of which immediately came two hands that held him fast.

Billy looked foolish when he found himself thus caught, and the woman met his look with a smile.

"How do you like it?" she queried.

"Oh, I'm contented anywhere," was the reply, but the boy detective did not look it.

He was left alone in the room, but the mechanical arms of the chair held him fast, and he could not escape.

After a while his captor came back and looked at him some time without speaking.

"Playing a game, weren't you?" she said.

Billy did not speak.

"It's all one; you may talk, or keep a still tongue in your head. I am not particular. I don't like people who track other folks, and I despise the ferret."

"People who have fears of the police generally don't like ferrets."

"You don't want to insinuate," and she bent forward and gazed into Billy's face.

All at once she bounded from the room, and presently the boy heard voices beyond the wall.

There was a man on the other side, and a thought of Simon Slyboots rushed through his mind.

What if that villain of villains had come back?

By and by the noises died away and he heard nothing again.

An hour passed, and he was still the occupant of the chair. No one seemed to inhabit the house. The dim light flickered along the wall and then went out altogether.

Billy was once more in darkness as deep as the darkness of Egypt, nor was this all.

He seemed to be rising in midair, propelled upward by unseen power, though he could not feel any hands about him.

He had heard of traps opening in the floor and letting the victims down into unknown depths; but here this was reversed, and he was moving up and up, higher and higher.

The strange movement continued till he appeared to be fifty feet in the air.

When he stopped he leaned forward in hopes of seeing how far he had risen, but could make out nothing.

He tugged at his singular bonds, essayed with all his strength to get out of the chair, even though by so doing he would fall down and down to the bottom of an unknown abyss; but the mechanical claws would not open.

Presently there was a strange click and Billy was shot once more upward, the floor seemed to open, and he was in a room well-lighted and well-furnished.

As the chair stopped the hands fell off and he sprung from its depths.

Free at last—free from the chair at any rate!

The Boy Shadower stood a moment and collected his thoughts. He was in a little chamber well-carpeted and furnished with books. The walls were adorned with paintings, and from the window, which was crossed and recrossed with bars of steel, he could look down upon a thriving portion of the city and catch the lights and shadows of the streets.

But the oddest thing about the apartment was the apparent absence of a door.

The room did not seem to possess anything of the kind.

This so puzzled Billy Winks that he smiled in spite of himself.

A room without a door was indeed a mystery such as he had never heard of.

He was hunting for a door when a sound caused him to turn suddenly and he saw that a legend had appeared on the wall at his back.

Where a moment before there were no letters, he now saw a line of words and this is what he read:

"This room is as good as a tomb to the unfortunate who inhabits it. It has no outlet and every sound made within its walls dies here."

This was not very pleasant reading for the boy detective of New York and for a moment every thing looked dark.

He went closer to the letters and saw that they were actually there, that it was not the wild imagining of one's brain.

"Why don't you come forward like a brave person and face me?" exclaimed Billy. "I am not afraid to face my fate whatever it be and right here I want to say that I am not the sole possessor of the secret for which the police of New York are hunting. The longer I am shut up here the sooner will the secret be given out by the avengers of justice and though I perish in this doorless chamber, I will be avenged by a hand as powerful as Fate's."

There was no response to these words which died away within the walls of the room, and Billy Winks fell back and seemed to wait for some sign.

While he watched the letters on the wall they appeared to die out, but no others took their place.

He went to the window and once more looked out.

Far below lay a small back-yard, and beyond it the tall brick wall of a large building.

A group of children were playing in the back-yard, and Billy longed to acquaint them with his situation; but this was out of the question.

He could see the little ones in the light that fell from half a dozen windows, and for nearly ten minutes he stood at the sill and watched them.

The same sound that acquainted him with the appearance of the letters on the wall, was heard again, and he turned to see another line.

This time it was very brief:

"The fox knows he is caught!"

Ah, how terribly true that was. Yes, Billy Winks knew he had been netted, and that he was cooped up in a room from which there was no escape.

All at once a certain frenzy seemed to seize the boy detective; he sprang to where the books were and jerked one from the shelves.

When he opened it a cry welled from his throat.

Every page was blank!

"This is worse than death itself!" cried the caged boy. "This is the most terrible trap I ever heard of," and he flung himself into the chair from which he had lately escaped, and sat there with no color in his face.

The long night—it was the longest in his history—passed, and he saw the welcome light of another day.

He had slept but little, and was at the window looking out over the city.

If the room was without a door, how would his food be brought to him, or perhaps none would be brought.

After awhile a woman came out on a porch within a stone's throw of his prison.

As she cast a look toward the barred window, the boy detective caught up one of the books and forced it through the bars.

The next moment he was beating the glass with all his might.

"I will tell them that I am here. I will have the police enter this den and rescue me. Simon Slyboots and his friends sha'n't triumph over me very long."

But alas for Billy's hopes, the glass was thick and would not yield, and he was obliged to withdraw the book without inflicting any injury.

The woman was still on the porch, and Billy imagined that he had been seen.

He drew back and taking out his pocket-knife, hurled it at the window with all his might.

As luck would have it, it spun between two bars and striking the glass shattered it and let in a breath of air.

The woman on the opposite porch seemed to have heard the noise of breaking glass for she looked at the window and Billy sprang to the opening with a cry of victory.

"Help! help! help!" he shouted at the top of his voice and looked toward the porch.

The young woman—he could see that she was young—seemed to understand the situation, for she waved her hand, looked another moment and vanished.

"I don't know what effect it will have," thought the boy prisoner of the League. "It may tighten the coils around me, but nothing risked nothing gained."

With his heart in his throat, as it were, he stood at the window, eagerly watching the opposite porch. Seconds seemed hours to the boy and he was on the point of despairing when the girl came back.

"She shakes her head at me, intimating that she can't help me," gasped the young ferret of New York, and even while he spoke she vanished again and he saw her no more.

But at the same moment the floor seemed to tremble beneath his feet.

CHAPTER XI.

MOLLY MARKS SHOWS HER GRIT.

CAPTAIN ORTIZ, who was posing now as Pedron Jarillo, the sole heir to Napoleon Gregg's estate, was in high feather.

He did not see how he could be baffled, for the boy, Tom Wagner, had not turned up and the police were of the opinion that he was gone for good.

No one seemed to think for a moment that the captain himself had had a hand in the boy's disappearance. He did not look like a villain, but if Billy Winks could have been heard while he was cooped up in the strange house he might have spun a tale that would have created some excitement.

The reader will remember that Molly Marks, the fair seamstress and Billy Winks's friend,

had encountered the Cuban captain on the street and had suspected him of having to do with the death of her father some years prior to the date of our story.

The young girl was alone in her little room on the night of Billy Winks's adventure when a rap sounded on the door and the next moment without second thought she had bade the knocker enter.

In he came, the tall dark man from Cuba, and Molly gave vent to a sharp cry when her eyes fell upon him.

Captain Ortiz—we will call him so to the end of the game despite the other name he has assumed for a purpose—came forward and took a chair, at the same time watching the girl like a snake.

He did not hold back very long, but proceeded to business at once.

"I thought your face resembled a face I used to see years ago," said he. "It was in Cuba and when I encountered you on the street the other day I could not help thinking about a man who was lost at sea near the Ever Faithful Isle when I was still there."

Molly started, for the cunning rascal was talking about her father, and she watched him narrowly hoping to see what he was after, for she believed his mission to her home was one which greatly concerned her welfare.

"The man of whom you speak must have been my father for he was drowned at sea off the coast of Cuba years ago," she answered him.

"Captain Marks?"

"Captain Marks."

The Cuban was silent for a moment, but all at once he took a packet from an inner pocket and began to unwrap it.

The face of Molly, the sewing-girl, lost color as she watched him and when she saw the picture which he uncovered she started to her feet.

"That is my mother's face!" she cried, pointing at the portrait. "Let me see it."

But Captain Ortiz, looking up with a smile, withheld the picture and seemed to draw out of her reach.

"What, do you withhold it from me?"

"It is mine, for Captain Marks gave it to me when we were friends in Cuba and I was not to part with it, not even for a moment."

"And you were friends there?" and the eyes of Molly Marks seemed to look the captain through.

"We were friends and a tie strong as life itself united us."

"You wrote my mother about the loss of the Fleetwing," said the girl, still eying him.

"I did and a sorrowful task it was, too."

For a moment longer Molly Marks sat and seemed to make a study of the Cuban's face.

"Some time before the loss of the ship mother received a letter from father. In that letter he wrote about one Captain Ortiz with whom he had become acquainted. He told of the man's plantation, how rich he was, how many slaves he had and what a wonderful forest he had where he used to hunt. One day a letter came which told us that he had put the wrong estimate on this man, Ortiz, that he was not the gentleman he had judged him, that, instead of being his friend, he was, in fact, his foe, and that he had discovered a plot to seize the Fleetwing and perhaps murder all on board."

Molly paused, but the face of the man who listened did not change.

Captain Ortiz sat upright in his chair with his keen eyes fastened upon the fair girl; not a muscle moved.

His coolness did not frustrate Molly, indeed, it only seemed to nerve her to play the game out, for she had resolved to tell this man, now that he had come to her, that she knew him for a consummate scoundrel.

"When father came home he told us more than he had committed to paper," she went on. "He told us all he knew or had learned about this Captain Ortiz, and, young as I was at the time, I recall the advice mother gave him—not to go back, but to trade elsewhere where such men did not exist."

"But it seems he went back and the ship was lost."

"He went back and fought a duel with this man."

"With Captain Ortiz?" coolly asked the Cuban.

"Yes."

Molly thought she saw a smile at the corners of her visitor's mouth.

"I have every reason to believe that my father was wounded by Captain Ortiz," she went on. "We at first believed the letters we got from him, telling about the fate of the vessel,

but by and by other tidings came from that part of the world, and, then, we had other views. You are Captain Ortiz; you are the man who wrote those letters, and they tell me that you have put in a claim for a large estate, claiming to be the person called Pedron Jarillo in the will which makes you the heir after the death of the boy, Tom Wagner. I got some of this from the papers, and Uncle Josh who is somewhat peculiar, picks up a good deal on the street."

"You are very knowing. I am Pedron Jarillo, and in my time, for a purpose, I have been Captain Ortiz. You have strange thoughts about the death of your father, an I want to say that you are making some grave charges. I have come to help the friend of my friend—to give you brighter employment than that you have now, and to take you out of this house for one better and brighter. I will want a friend, a private secretary, when I am in the big house on the avenue, and I am here to offer the place to the daughter of my old friend, Captain Marks of the Fleetwing."

Molly had to look at the man for his audacity.

"I refuse to accept the situation," she said, coldly. "I am content where I am. I am happy here with Uncle Josh, and, then, I have other friends who would advise me against the change even though I wanted to make it."

"But you will have a better home. You will be surrounded with wealth and—"

"I refuse!" broke in the girl. "You must not forget that your denial of the charges made by my father has not altered my opinion of Captain Ortiz."

"You believe, then, that the duel was fought?"

"I do, and, what is more, I am inclined to credit the story told me once by a man who came from Cuba that the Fleetwing was burned at sea, and by the orders of the man who owned the great plantation with the fine groves."

The face of the handsome Cuban was now livid. Captain Ortiz arose and for a moment looked down upon the girl.

"You may wish you had not rejected the offer I have made," he said.

"I don't think I shall ever regret having done so."

"Think a moment."

"If to think means to come over to you and accept the offer of the home on the avenue and to dwell under the same roof with the man suspected of having had to do with the death of my father, I will not think."

Molly Marks now stood erect with a smile on her beautiful face and her eyes turned full upon the man from Cuba.

"You don't want to breathe abroad what you have told me here," almost hissed the captain.

"I shall tell my opinions where they are likely to bring the guilty to justice!"

"You are but a girl and years have intervened since the Fleetwing vanished from human sight."

"But all witnesses are not dead."

Captain Ortiz laid one hand on the knob and leaned toward Molly while his eyes got a sudden flash.

"Because I am a stranger here you must not think that I am powerless," he said. "I am as much Captain Ortiz as when I lived and had my way in Cuba. Besides this, I am not alone. I have friends as well as others. I can strike and strike as hard as those who profess to have hands of iron. You can't make headway against me, girl. I can blight your life and by the lifting of my hand. You are foolish to combat me."

At this juncture a noise was heard and Molly, stepping across the room, threw open the door.

Captain Ortiz recoiled from the young man who threw himself into the apartment and then laid one hand upon his hip.

"Jim, that is the man I have told you about," said Molly, turning to the youth. "Is he the same one you have seen in consultation with Simon Slyboots and his friend?"

"He's the same chicken, Molly, and the three have got away with Billy Winks in some manner."

"Who are you?" demanded Captain Ortiz.

"I'm Jim, the son of Mother Magog, for I guess you know her best by that name. I haven't as good a record as an angel, but it's as good as yours, and I don't intend to mince matters when in your presence."

Jim advanced a step, but threw a look toward Molly.

"Shall I throw him out, Molly?" he asked.

Captain Ortiz fell back against the door and jerked it open. He did not want a collision with Jim, and instead of seeking one, he sprang

across the step and halted a moment in the hall.

"I'll see both of you later," he cried.

"You'll have to do it almighty soon or the warden of Sing Sing will prevent the interview," answered Jim, and the next moment the captain of the Centipede was gone.

As he went down-stairs he growled to himself and what he said boded Molly Marks no good.

CHAPTER XII.

TWO IN A TRAP.

"I WONDER what's going to happen now?" passed through Billy Winks's mind when the floor trembled under his feet.

He fully expected to see it open and send him down into some unknown abyss, but nothing of the kind occurred.

Instead, the trembling passed off, and he was left in the round room which had no doors.

The morning had fully come and he was hungry.

"This isn't a place where one has a chance to order his breakfast," he thought. "I can't get drip coffee here and talk back to the waiter if the meat is underdone. I will be lucky if I get anything at all."

He went to the window once more, and looked across the space that intervened between him and the house where he had seen the girl who had shown no disposition to assist him, but she was not there.

But in her place stood a man who looked very like one who was connected with the police.

Billy saw that the man was eying the broken window, and drawing near it, he thrust his hand through the opening and tried to wave it at the stranger on the porch.

He thought he saw a nod telling that he had been seen, when the man disappeared as the girl had done, and Billy was left to himself.

Click, click, went something on the wall again.

The boy detective turned and saw another line of letters on the wall.

"The fuse is lighted and the fire runs!"

"Heavens! am I to be blown up with the house?" he cried, falling back from what he had just read, and for a moment he stood in the middle of the room with the whitest face he had ever had.

"Where is the man who was on the porch?" he cried, rushing to the window.

But the porch was quite deserted, and he could not see any one who seemed to offer help.

Once more the floor trembled, and this time it began to settle.

In a short time Billy was out of the doorless chamber, and found himself in another apartment beneath it, and alone.

This room was dark, but he could feel the furniture it contained, and he was on the point of trying to open a door, when it seemed to open of its own accord, and he fell back with a sharp exclamation.

The woman—Violet the Death-Flower—stood before him once more!

"How did you like the upper story?" she asked with a smile, leaning toward Billy.

The young beagle laughed.

"I believe I would sooner live on board the Centipede."

The woman started.

"She knows Captain Ortiz," said the boy to himself. "This woman is in the pay of the gang and has her orders."

Violet, who had turned on the gas, stood off and looked closely at Billy Winks.

"You're in the secret, aren't you?" he asked.

"In what secret?"

"Why, in the one that puzzles the police. You know something about Tom Wagner."

"Why, you little rascal, you must think I am into everything," was the quick retort, and the young detective saw the woman bending over him with flashing eyes.

"I don't say that, but a woman who is connected in any way with Simon Slyboots is likely to be into a good many things not exactly straight."

"Do you think so?" and she laughed again.

It seemed to Billy that Violet was getting in better humor and he also thought he could detect a fear of something in her tone.

"Don't you know that they have their hands over Simon's head, that they can drop onto him whenever they want to, and when they do, don't you see that they will take all connected with the scheme?"

She did not speak.

"They will even rake in the Cuban captain, who is the real head of the plot against the boy?"

"What boy?"

"Tom Wagner, old Gregg's grandson, for whom the police are looking now, though they are not as shrewd as some others who really hold the thread of the puzzle in their hands."

"Are you one of those?" asked Violet.

Billy smiled knowingly.

"If I am I was sharp enough to leave what I know in the hands of somebody else before I became your captive. You did not think I would come into this trap without having some one else on guard, ready to let the cat out of the bag if I got into trouble?"

The look that had come into Violet's eyes was a comical one, yet it gave the Boy Shadower some hope.

"When they are all pulled in what will you do, Violet?" he asked.

No answer.

"Won't you look fine behind the ten of diamonds, when you could have remained here and been as free as a bird in the forest?"

"Look here," and the hand of the woman clutched Billy Winks's arm. "I know what you are trying to do; you want to get out of here the worst kind, and you are trying to frighten me into letting you out. It's as plain as the nose on your face, but I am not the person to open the door contrary to orders."

"Just as you like. I am in your power, but all the time the hands of the clock of fate are moving, and you must not complain if, when they reach a certain point, they pronounce your doom."

"What will it be?"

"What do you think it ought to be after serving Captain Ortiz and Simon Slyboots?"

There was a sharp cry from the woman's throat, and she fell back and looked into Billy Winks's eyes.

"It won't be a fine house and a big parlor," he remarked.

"Come, you can't hoodwink me."

"I don't want to. I am only giving you little bits of truth, and if you don't want to accept them, why, I am through. You can't win this game. The boy is missing, but we know who took him off; we know with whom he walked out of the Park the night he vanished, and don't you think we have been on the trail long enough to have an idea where he is?"

The next moment a bell tinkled over the woman's head, and she turned to the hall.

Billy heard her there a moment, and then followed the shutting of a door.

In another instant the creature came back, excitement in her eyes, and springing toward him she seized his wrist and jerked him across the floor.

"You have told the truth, but they sha'n't find you when they come in!" she cried.

Billy drew back, but the hand of Violet was too strong for him, and he was dragged into another room and down a flight of steps, as if some infernal power clothed the woman's muscles.

All at once a key clicked in a lock, and as a door opened he was thrown forward, and the last words he heard were:

"I guess you'll have company in there. Go and see."

Billy Winks fell upon his face, but rose and stood in the dark till he heard a voice.

"Who are you?" asked the voice he heard.

The young ferret of Gotham started forward, but brought up against a cot which he could feel in the dark.

"I am here, and have been ever since I fell into the trap they set for me. I am Tom Wagner, the lost boy for whom I guess grandfather is looking in every hole and corner of the city."

The words took Billy Winks's breath, and for some moments he could only press the hand he had found, and could not use his tongue.

"You seem to be a boy like myself."

"I am," said the boy ferret, at last. "I am Billy Winks. You know we used to meet in the Park—"

"I remember you. But how came you here?"

"I made a trap and walked into it. I am looking for you—"

"And you have found me! What is the news outside? How is Grandfather Gregg?"

Billy did not answer.

"I guess it's all over with him," continued the lost boy of the avenue. "He was near death's door when they sprung the trap on me. I have been here, I can't tell how long, for I can't reckon time in this place. Simon Slyboots is at the head of the plot, and he is the man who netted me."

"Netted you for Captain Ortiz?"

"You may know more than I do," said Tom. "You once told me that you sometimes hunted rascals down and turned them over to the police."

"I do that yet, and when I get out of here I will have some lively work."

"When you get out, eh? Do you expect to get out of this place?"

"Why not? I have never been in a trap that I did not get out and make somebody sweat for springing it on me."

"You've got the kind of grit I like, and of course I will do my share of the business, but it seems to me that we are two rats in a cage, and that the key has been lost."

Billy left the young heir and went to the door.

"I was hustled down here in a way that told me that some one dangerous to the gang had discovered the trap. I was in the high room and managed to signal a man on a porch, but I can't say what I accomplished."

"They brought me here at once. Simon Slyboots turned me over to the tigress called Violet, and I have been in her power ever since."

Suddenly a noise startled both boys.

In an instant they were on their feet, and were listening with all ears.

"I will stand my ground, and the two are as safe here as at the bottom of the river!" said a voice. "I have locked the door for the last time, and when I quit the house it will never open to let any one out."

That was all.

The voice ceased, and in the awful silence Billy Winks and Tom Wagner heard the beating of their own hearts.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE IRON KEY.

If the boys shut up in the dark place belonging to the old house could have looked beyond the door of their prison, they would have seen and recognized the speaker.

It was Violet, the Death-Flower, and she faced a man who looked in the demi-gloom very like Simon Slyboots, the oily rascal of the city of mysteries.

"That's all right," said Simon, with a grin. "All you have to do is to carry out your words and keep a still tongue in your head. I have finished with my employer for the present, though I am by no means done with him."

Violet walked away with Simon, looking up into his face until they had gained a lighted room when she sprung forward and caught his arm.

"I'll take my pay now," she said.

In an instant Simon Slyboots was gazing into her face.

"Your pay?" he echoed with a derisive smile. "I'd like to know what you've earned."

"What haven't I earned?" said the woman. "I have been the slave of the whole plot and now when I ask for my wages, I am laughed at and by you, the last man who ought to be guilty of that."

"It seems to me you're very cool about this affair. I told you that I would see that you were paid and I intend to."

"The game is out and I am waiting for what is coming to me," and Violet held out her hand.

"I am going to keep still, and that is pay enough, I think."

The look that the startled creature shot Simon Slyboots was almost enough to shock him.

"Is that my pay?"

"Isn't it enough?"

"What if I shouldn't keep as still as you say you intend to?"

"You don't think of giving the snap away, do you?"

"There is no telling what a woman will do."

Simon laughed again and in her face.

"I am going away. I want to get as far from New York as I can. I want to put seas between me and the door back there. I want to live in such a manner as not to think of the past which I am leaving behind."

"Well, live as you please; it's all one to me."

Violet looked at him, and then came on with her hands shut.

"I am desperate, Simon Slyboots. You have made me as desperate a creature as this accursed city shelters. I have served you and your master, the Cuban; I know what has been done, and I have been a part of the game. I have played jailer, and played it well. Without me you could not have succeeded, and the boy would not be now a lost heir to half a million. Give me enough to get away on. I won't ask anything more."

Simon Slyboots, with a look that seemed to freeze the beholder, shrugged his shoulders in an insulting manner, and smiled provokingly.

"Don't you intend to give me my pay?"

"How much do you want?"

"Five hundred."

"Heavens! I'm no millionaire. You must think I'm a bank president, or the owner of a Stock Exchange."

"But think what you get from Captain Ortiz, without taking half the risks I have."

"You don't know that he is to pay me a dollar."

"You don't help men for nothing."

"I don't, eh? I reckon I know what I get, if anything, and here you want five hundred merely for keeping the key to a certain door. I guess not!" and he ran his hands into the depths of his pockets and shook his head.

Just as he turned toward the door, Violet's hand closed suddenly on his shoulder, and he was jerked back into the middle of the room.

"I can go away without pay," she said, and there was a desperate glare in her eyes. "I know where the river is."

"Well, go to it, then!"

He looked at her with a malicious eye and opened the door.

"Let me say one thing before we part," he went on. "If you ever do anything looking toward giving the snap into the hands of the cops, I want to say here that you will wish you had never seen the steeples of New York. Do it if you dare!"

He shut the door in her face and went out.

Violet stood in the room for a moment, and seemed to listen to his steps till the sound of them died away.

"Have I helped them for this?" she cried. "He has received thousands for his share of the work, and I have made success certain. What did he do, anyhow? He decoyed the boy from home, brought him to my house, and I have acted as his jailer, keeping him out of sight, and the whole city believes him dead. Then, I kept the boy ferret in the trap when he came on a mission which, if successful, would render the play abortive, and here, when I ask for enough to take me from the scenes of my life, I am refused, even laughed at."

She clinched her hands while she spoke, and when she had finished she went to the window and stood there some time, looking out upon the street through the shutters.

"I could go and tell all. Then I could go back and unlock the door which stands between the boys and liberty. But I would have to put many miles between me and Captain Ortiz and his men. I would be hunted as mercilessly as ever wolf was hunted. I know what they are—Simon Slyboots is one of the coolest cut-throats living, and Reck Sloper but little better. What shall I do?"

She walked across the room, and seemed to have made up her mind.

In another moment she was at the door leading to the steps that took one to the chamber tenanted by Billy Winks and Tom Wagner.

"Are you going to let the rats out?" said a voice behind her.

Violet turned as if a serpent had hissed at her heels.

Near by, grinning from ear to ear, stood Simon Slyboots!

"What, have you come back?" cried the woman. "I thought you had gone away."

"But I thought I would drop back and see how you were getting along."

There was no reply for a moment, and the half-frightened creature watched him with her foot at the dungeon door.

"Listen," said Billy Winks to his companion in the dark. "The woman, Violet, is out there once more, and she is talking to some one."

The boys were at the threshold, and their eagerness was something startling.

"Give me the key," said Simon Slyboots.

"I am jailer still."

"No, you are discharged from this moment. Give me the key!"

Violet felt in her pocket and grasped the iron key which held the young friends in durance.

With a word which the boys could not comprehend, she threw it at Simon's feet, and the rattle of the iron on the stones was distinctly heard.

"You wanted five hundred, I believe," continued the sharp. "There, take that."

Violet stooped and picked up a roll of bills which he had tossed at her feet, but the next moment they were in his face.

"It is three hundred short," she cried. "I want five hundred or nothing."

Simon coolly transferred the money to his pocket and at the same time secreted the iron key.

"Good-by," said he with a laugh. "You can get away whenever you want to go. You know the road out of this house. But, as I have said, beware!"

She nodded and looked after him with a savage gleam under her long lashes and he went whistling up the corridor till he disappeared.

Scarcely had he gone when Violet threw herself against the heavy door.

"Are you in there?" she asked.

"Of course we're here," answered Billy Winks.

"Well, you won't stay very long. I am going to see that both of you get out."

"That's clever and we will see in return that you lose nothing by your act."

"I don't ask anything. I won't expect to be protected even. I am tired of serving a nest of scoundrels and I want to see them lose the prize."

She went off before either of the boys could reply and they were left again in darkness with no sounds of any sort to reach their ears.

Violet gained the street and hurried off.

There was an eagerness in her step and a certain whiteness to her face that boded evil to Simon Slyboots and his game.

She did not trust herself to the cars, but walked on and on and at last turned into Mulberry street.

Her last turn told of her destination. She knew where the police station was.

"In a few moments you will be unmasked, Simon Slyboots," she said half aloud. "I am desperate and you have dared me. I will get out of this infamous affair, even though it gets me into prison. Captain Ortiz, who has won thousands, may pay you, but you refuse to pay me and the whole gang shall suffer."

In another five minutes' walk she would have reached the station, but some one was on her track.

Violet looked back in time to see the hand that descended upon her shoulder, and before she could spring from beneath it, it fell with the power of a trip-hammer.

"Going to give the snap away, were you?" cried the owner of the hand. "I guess you will come with me," and as she was pulled back she tried but vainly to articulate a single word.

Poor Violet! She was in the clutches of as cool a villain as ever played a bold hand for big stakes, and before she found her tongue she was half a block back and the glowing eyes of Simon Slyboots were looking triumphantly into her face.

There was no doubt that the rascal had followed her from the house and had watched his opportunity.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN OPPORTUNE ARRIVAL.

MEANTIME Jim, Mother Magog's son, was again looking for Billy Winks, whom he had lost for the second time.

Jim knew the city, and as he had an inkling that Captain Ortiz was laying his plans for the final capturing of old Gregg's money, he was very anxious to discover the boy detective, for, with their heads together, he was sure that he and Billy could hatch out a plan that would baffle the plotters.

But one thing was against Jim, and this was his unenviable record.

He was no angel by any manner of means, but he did not conceal this, though there were several crimes which only Simon Slyboots knew about and this knowledge had been the club which the rascal had held over his head for months.

But now Jim had a counter-club for, as we know, he had preserved the letter which, in reality, had frightened old man Gregg to death, and it was ready to come forth whenever occasion should require.

It happened that Jim was on the street when Simon was leading Violet off in triumph, and seeing this, he resolved to follow the pair.

If Simon Slyboots had seen the young man, there might have been a change of play, but he kept so well in shadow that he was not seen at all, and succeeded in following Simon and his charge to a house, which was the same one from which Violet had fled.

Jim watched the place till he grew tired, and as no one came out, he fell to wondering what had taken place.

At last, however, the door opened and the sleek rascal came out, and after having been followed some distance, was joined by Captain Ortiz, and the two adjourned to a drinking-place which Jim, with his hat pulled over his eyes, entered on a mission of investigation.

Captain Ortiz was leaning over a small dark table talking earnestly to Simon, who was listening very closely.

The Cuban Captain was agitated.

"You'll become more excited than you are

now as the game goes on," remarked Jim in an undertone. "You must have made a sudden discovery that everything isn't going along just as you would like to have it. Just wait till I've found Billy Winks and we get our noggins together. Then look a little out, Captain Ortiz."

Jim did not get to hear very much, and when the two came out of the saloon they almost espied him, and would have done so if he had not dodged behind a man.

Captain Ortiz looked more hopeful when he came out of the place than he had when he entered it, and Simon was whistling a merry tune as if everything was moving along to suit him.

The Cuban walked off, followed by Jim, who wanted to see where he went, and in time he had him run down in a house where, as Pedron Jarillo, he had rooms.

The captain found several letters on his table when he entered the room on the second floor, and one of these he took up with more haste than the others.

"By Jove! this is the very hour named in this letter, and I wonder if he will come," he exclaimed aloud.

There was a heavy step on the stair just beyond the room, and before he could prevent the entrance of any one the door opened and an old man came in.

"I guess I'm on time, ain't I?" said this person who was no one else than Timothy Turk, Tom Wagner's eccentric relative.

Captain Ortiz glared at him like a Cuban cat, but did not speak.

"You got my letter, I see, and I thought I would be punctual."

"But I have not consented to the interview."

"But we will have it all the same—"

Captain Ortiz broke the sentence with an oath, and waved his yellow hand toward the door.

"Shut the door, eh? Of course. Now we are alone and I will make my business known. You are Pedron Jarillo?"

"I am."

"You will soon take possession of the estate left by Napoleon Gregg as being the person next to Tom Wagner in the will. The boy is a relative of mine, and I represent him here."

"You do?"

"That's what I do, and I am glad to be able to do so."

The old man talked with emphasis, under which the man from Cuba bit his lip.

"I want to know where Tom is."

The seeming absurdity of the words caused Captain Ortiz to burst into a fit of laughter.

"Look here, old fellow, I am in no mood for joking, and you will have to excuse me to-day."

Timothy Turk's features did not change.

"I am not joking. I never joke at all, and if you don't like my language, you will have to put up with it while I am here."

"Go on."

Perhaps Captain Ortiz thought that the more he humored the old man the sooner he would get shut of him, and so he allowed him to proceed.

"In the first place, I am one of the few who don't believe Tom Wagner dead," he went on. "The boy is the victim of a plot, and I think I know one or two people who are concerned in it."

"That's good. Why don't you take your information to the police?"

"I'm not quite ready for that yet."

"And you have concluded to consult me instead?"

"Just so."

Captain Ortiz glanced at the unopened letters, and waited for the old man to go on.

"While the boy lives you can't get your hands on the property," he said.

"That's not troubling me one whit."

"You will have to prove that Tom Wagner is dead—"

"That will not be hard to do, I am sorry to say, from a certain point of view."

"You mean that you are sorry for the boy's sake?"

"Yes."

"You once did Napoleon Gregg a service in Cuba?"

"I got him a wife there—Tom's mother."

"Yes. You seemed very anxious to have the match come off just as if you looked ahead to something of this sort."

The Cuban's face grew very dark for a moment.

"Now, my dear captain, what would you say if I, Timothy Turk, were to tell the story of the loss of the Fleetwing, and how a duel was fought between you and her captain in your elegant orange grove?"

"I would say that it would be money in your pockets, for, as I am one of the lions of the

hour, the newspapers are anxious to get all the news they can about me, and they would allow you so much per column for the narrative."

The very coolness of the Cuban was perplexing and eccentric Timothy Turk could not overlook it.

"I guess I'm about through," he said, leaving his chair and retreating to the door with his eyes riveted upon the man from Cuba.

Ortiz drew a breath of relief.

"No, hold on a minute! I forgot something. You haven't told me where Tom is."

"What if I should say I didn't know?"

"Then I, the last of the Turks, would say deliberately that Captain Ortiz lied."

A flush of brightness came instantly to the Cuban captain's cheek, and he started toward the old man, but suddenly checked himself.

"I guess you will tell me before you touch me," cried old Timothy, suddenly drawing a revolver and thrusting it into Captain Ortiz's face.

Taken aback by this sudden display of war, the man from the tropics stopped and looked into Timothy's face over the leveled pistol.

"You know, for one of your minions took him off," continued Timothy Turk. "I have no compunctions, none at all, and would as soon blow out your brains as those of a pig."

His look confirmed these words, and the eyes that glared behind the six-shooter told Captain Ortiz that he must be dealing with a crazy man.

"I am going to count three, and if at the end of the count I haven't been told where Tom Wagner is, I will proceed to give the coroner of New York a job."

The breath of the Cuban came fast.

"I shall begin without any further ceremony, so here I go. One—"

Captain Ortiz looked toward the door for he was almost sure he had caught the sound of footsteps there.

"This weapon carries six bullets, captain. I am going to find Tom or turn the man who is playing such a cool hand into a lead mine, I am. Two—"

The door opened.

On the threshold stood the tall figure of Reck Sloper who had not dropped in for the purpose of rescuing any one in particular, but on a mission calculated to replenish his pockets through the blackmailer's arts.

He took in the situation at a glance, but did not stir.

"Stand where you are! I am running this thing," said Timothy Turk with a mad glance at the new-comer.

Captain Ortiz's eyes made an appeal which was hard to resist. Perhaps Mr. Sloper thought that should Timothy press the trigger, a certain source of revenue would vanish, and in a moment, with more courage than he had ever displayed, he bounded across the room, knocked the revolver into the air and threw the old man against the wall.

It was like the sudden swoop of a thunder-bolt.

Captain Ortiz seized Sloper's hand and looked into his eye.

"I won't forget this," he said. "It is worth—"

"About five thousand," finished the money shark.

"Both of you are wrong," put in old Timothy who was picking himself up in one corner. "It will cost you a term in Sing Sing if not a jig on the gallows," and before either could detain him he had sprung across the room and was gone.

CHAPTER XV.

LIFE IN A LION'S DEN.

WHEN Reck Sloper left the room occupied by Captain Ortiz he considered himself richer by several thousands than he was when he crossed its threshold.

He had been the means of saving the Cuban's life from the pistol of Timothy Turk who would have pressed the trigger if the man from the tropics had not given him the information he was after.

Sloper, who lacked the coolness displayed by Simon Slyboots, was withal a man of some good points, and he was soon far from the scene of his adventure in search of his friend Simon to whom he was eager to detail his exploit.

If he had turned his face in another direction he might have run across two boys sneaking through the shadows of New York, the one in advance being our friend Billy Winks and his companion long-lost Tom Wagner who once more found himself on the streets of the city.

To cut a long story short, Violet had opened

the door of their prison and they were making their way to a place where the boy ferret was anxious that Tom should hide for a time.

They reached this place which turned out to be Molly Marks's little house, and there the lost boy heir was made as comfortable as possible.

"I am out of the trap and now the ratcatcher will have to look out," said Billy Winks. "The first thing I shall turn my attention to will be the locating of the captain's house, but I don't think that will be difficult."

The following day Billy, looking over a newspaper while he was "taking a snip," as he called it, in the cheap restaurant he patronized, saw a notice in the "want column" that riveted his gaze.

"I wonder if I could get myself up so as to hoodwink the hawk from Cuba," he thought, reading the notice for the second time. "It is risky, but worth trying, for it would give me an insight into the very workings of the plot, though, if I should be discovered, it wouldn't go very smoothly with yours truly."

Billy laid the paper down and went home.

Jim had been there looking for him, as he found out, and a note lying on the table, Jim having tossed it over the transom, told him that, unless he found him elsewhere, he (Jim) would return that night.

"I'll play my new hand and then run the chances," remarked Billy.

At ten o'clock a boy who did not look in the least like the young ferret of New York presented himself at the door of the house occupied by Captain Ortiz.

The door was opened by a young woman who asked him in, and in a moment he found himself on the inside.

"Don't look very much like a lion's den, but that's what it is," muttered the boy detective, taking in the scene that presented itself.

Just then he heard footsteps and in a second Captain Ortiz, in smoking jacket, made his appearance.

The captain of the Centipede looked at the boy and then nodded good-naturedly.

"You're the tenth I've had already," said he.

"Then I'm lucky, for it's queer you haven't had ten hundred."

Captain Ortiz told the young ferret to enter a room alongside the hall and wait for him which he did and in a little while found himself alone.

The Cuban was not out of sight very long and when he came sauntering in he had changed his apparel and looked more like his old self.

"I want a boy," he began, crossing his legs and taking a cigar from an open box on the table. "You may have heard of me. I am besieged by cranks. They have been calling ever since the rascally papers have told them that I live here. You see I have been kicked into a fortune, and they come to me thinking that what comes easily will depart as easy, and that I stand here all the time with my purse strings open, ready to fill the pockets of every Tom, Dick and Harry who calls."

"That's just like some people, and you want a boy who can tell a crank when he sees one and who will not let them inside?"

"That's it exactly. The girl who opened the door to you won't do at all. She thinks it her duty to let everybody in and she religiously obeys her sweet will. You know the city?"

"I ought to."

"Born here?"

"Yes."

"Name?"

"Ned Hanley."

"Well, Master Hanley, I guess you will do. The job won't be a very long one, for I expect to move to other quarters in a few days and then I will be among people who don't allow cranks within a stone's throw of their homes."

And so Billy Winks found himself in the employ of the very man who had hissed a jaguar upon him.

He realized that he was in "the lion's den," as he called it, that if he was suspected, he would be in a predicament to which even the confinement of the top room of the strange house would be a pleasure, but he had weighed everything before coming to the place, and he was prepared to take the consequences.

If the disguise held out he was safe; if it failed, his life might pay the penalty.

He had hardly taken his place when the bell sent its tones through the house and Billy answered the ring.

A man stood on the step.

"We ain't giving our wealth away," said Billy, shutting the door in the man's face and watching his lips curl with scorn as he turned away.

"Who was it, Ned?" asked Captain Ortiz, coming into the hall.

"One of the Crank family, and I sent him off before he could get his request in. I don't know whether he was an orphan or some agent for the Senegambian Society; but he didn't get a cent all the same, and off he went."

Back went Billy to the little room where he was to answer the bell and the long hours began to pass.

The interior of the house shut off from the rays of the sun, was quite dark and the room cool.

Billy knew that Captain Ortiz was in the adjoining room, for a subtle perfume of tobacco stole into the chamber he occupied and he resolved to be on his guard.

The long day waned and the shadows of night came.

He thought of Jim, and longed to have an interview with Mother Magog's son.

"I am here on duty and can't steal out and see Jim," said the boy detective. "I will have to see him another time, for if I keep my post here I will win. Something will come to me here and I will pick up the clew I want."

Suddenly the bell rung and he bounded from his chair and sprung into the hall.

As he entered he saw the door open and a man appeared to him.

Simon Slyboots!

The young detective knew him on sight, and when the tall form of the rascal came forward Billy dodged back into the room and let him go on to Captain Ortiz.

He heard the door leading to the Cuban's room open and shut and master and man were together.

Billy moved over to the door between the rooms, and prepared to take mental notes of the interview.

Captain Ortiz was surprised to see Simon there at that hour, and the first words dropped by the sleek tool startled him.

"What made you threaten the girl?" asked Simon.

Captain Ortiz laughed.

"Confound her, she don't know a good thing when she sees it," he exclaimed. "But who told you that I have had an interview with Molly Marks?"

"I hear a good many things," answered Simon, in an off-hand manner. "She might have been won over, but now it is too late, unless a good hand is employed."

"That means 'hire me; I am the good hand,'" said Billy, under his breath. "This man is a gold-eater. He is money-hungry all the time, and now is trying to bleed the captain before he has had a chance to get his hands upon the estate for which he has played his cards."

"Do you know Molly Marks, Simon?"

"Don't I? If you had come to me some time ago and intimated so and so, I could have arranged this thing to your satisfaction, and you need not have had a tiff with the girl. You know how she lost her father?"

Captain Ortiz said "Yes," and then Simon went on:

"You see she more than half believes that the Fleetwing wasn't lost, as at first reported, but that a duel was fought by her captain and a certain Cuban gentleman, and that her father was mortally wounded."

"She as good as told me so."

"You were a little too fast, captain."

There was a moment's silence, when the voice of Simon Slyboots was heard again:

"You've got a boy, I noticed, when I came in?"

"Got him through the papers, to give the cranks the bounce, and he seems to fill the bill."

"He made himself scarce when he caught sight of me. I guess he saw I wouldn't stand any of his foolishness, and concluded to let me pass. About the same size of the boy I stopped from tracking us. He was really dangerous, captain, but it's all O. K. now, and we don't have to look back when we are abroad."

It was an hour before the interview ended, and the footsteps of Simon Slyboots went toward the door.

Billy Winks did not escort him out, but stood near the door, more than half fearing that some sudden impulse to look at him would take possession of Simon's noggin; but he was agreeably disappointed, and when he heard the door close on the figure of the oily villain of the streets he breathed free once more.

Verily life in a "lion's den" was somewhat exciting.

"Nothing risked nothing gained," said the boy ferret. "I am here for business, and here I will stay till I am ready to go back to Jim."

CHAPTER XVI.

AN EXCITED RASCAL.

MORE than once, Mother Magog's son caught himself wondering what had become of Billy Winks, the boy detective.

He did not know that he had entered the employ of the most dangerous man of the whole gang, Captain Ortiz himself, and if he had discovered this he would have feared for Billy's safety.

Meantime the young ferret had his eyes open and was watching every move made by the captain of the Centipede.

He knew that discovery meant danger, and he was resolved not to let such an event take place.

Captain Ortiz was so puffed up with the success he had achieved, that he was relaxing his watchfulness, and Billy observed this with a good deal of secret satisfaction.

Tom Wagner, awaiting the course of events at Molly Mark's house, was forming a friendship which promised to become permanent. The sewing-girl told him her history as she knew it, and led him to have a deeper seated hatred for the Cuban who had played such a bold game against him.

The night after Billy's adventure with Simon Slyboots, in Captain Ortiz's house, Tom and Molly were in the little sewing-room occupied by the girl when a rap sounded on the door.

In an instant the boy sprang behind a curtain that hung across one corner of the place, while Molly slowly opened the door to her visitor.

What was her surprise when the artful Simon presented himself!

The rascal was gotten up in style, and when he bowed to the girl, there was a sleek smile on his newly-shaven face.

"I thought I would call on a matter of business," said he, crossing his long legs complacently. "You see, Miss Molly, I have an inkling of the fate of your father, an event that happened long ago. Is it true that he was lost at sea in his vessel?"

Molly looked at him, wondering what interest he could be taking in her private affairs.

"I can not see how the event, saying that it is true, can interest you," she began when he stopped her.

"I beg your pardon, but it does all the same. I am anxious to get at the truth for, though years have passed and the vessel and its gallant souls are at the bottom of the sea, we may make discoveries that will put a new face on the matter."

"Do you mean to say that the story of the Fleetwing, as it has been told so often, may not be the true one?"

"Stranger things than that have happened."

Molly told as much of the story as she knew, but left out any reference to her father's duel with Captain Ortiz on the latter's plantation.

Simon Slyboots listened with a smile at his lips.

When he was gone, Tom Wagner came from behind the curtain and said:

"That villain has a motive in all he does, and he wanted to hear your story for the purpose of blackmailing some one."

"There is no doubt of it, and who would he blackmail but Captain Ortiz?"

"The very man! I wonder what has become of Billy Wink? The boy ought to know of this visit. He can fathom the man's duplicity, and I am anxious to get back into the old house."

"But you won't risk yourself on the street while these men are in the game?"

"I must if Billy don't soon come. I want to spring the trap on Captain Ortiz and his friends, and it can't be done without the boy detective's help."

"I am for giving him the glory of the catch," said Molly, with a glow of pride. "Billy Winks is worth his weight in gold, and I am proud of the boy."

To this Tom assented, and the two talked on about the man who had just left, and were canvassing the dark scheme that was being played when Molly's uncle came in.

Simon Slyboots went back to his rooms and threw himself into a chair with a laugh.

"Ho! I have another hold on him. That was a lucky visit I made to the girl. I will hold him tight with the new rope, and it will be worth a good many thousands before I let go."

The fellow was in his element, and he smoked half a dozen cigars over his thoughts.

Yes, he had another hold on the man he was bleeding; he could pull Captain Ortiz's purse, strings and draw from the purse itself more money for his needs.

Presently in came his partner, Reck Sloper, and the moment Simon saw the face before him he knew that something had happened.

Sloper took a chair, and with the sullenness of a beaten wolf, said in hoarse tones:

"I guess we're in for it, now. The rats are out of the trap."

"Out of what trap?" cried Simon, starting in spite of himself.

"Why, out of the cellar in the old house—the house once occupied by Violet."

For a moment there was no reply.

"I mean every word I say, for I have been there and seen for myself," was the answer. "I had a dream that would not let me rest one moment until I had investigated, and so I went to the spot and found the rats gone."

"And Violet?"

"Of course; she wasn't there waiting for me."

The clinched hand of Simon Slyboots came down upon the table with emphasis.

"A thousand curses upon the head of that woman!" he cried.

"That won't mend matters. I am going."

A sneer curled the lips of Slyboots.

"Cowards always run off and leave the brave to fight the battle single-handed," he said.

Reck Sloper looked at his old companion.

"You and the captain ought to be able to take care of the game as it is now," he replied. "I have something to live for—"

"A neck to save, eh?"

"Just as you think," grinned Reck. "Since you have said it, my neck is as dear to me as anything I possess. I don't want to look out from behind bars, for I'm a young man yet."

"Of course. Mr. Sloper, there is the door. You can go!"

Reck Sloper fell back, looking at his old pard, and reached the portal before he spoke again.

"Good-by, Simon," he said.

No answer.

"I wish you success, but, of course, I can't help you."

In an instant Simon Slyboots was on his feet, and his eyes were flashing fire.

"Get out of the house, or by the holy stars! I won't answer for what takes place," he roared.

"I have put up with your cowardice long enough, and the wonder is you haven't betrayed me to the cops before this."

"I don't do that. Can't you give a fellow credit for some virtues? Good-by, Simon."

Sloper shut the door in Simon's face and went down stairs.

"Escaped? That may not be true, but if it is they could not have got out without the connivance of Violet. That woman did not look at me when we parted for nothing. I thought I saw wickedness in her eye, and this is what she has done."

He put on his hat and followed Sloper to the street.

He glided under the lamps, keeping in the shadows of the buildings as much as possible until he reached the house formerly occupied by Violet.

Opening the door with a key which he took from his pocket, he went in and made his way to the dungeon where he had left the young captives, Billy and Tom.

It was locked as usual, but when he opened it and looked into the darkness ahead, a chill swept to his heart.

The very silence told him that the birds had escaped.

"I will get even with her! I think I know where to find the traitress," he growled. "She can't get out of the reach of my arm, no matter where she goes. Ah! won't I have vengeance for this?"

He tore back with his anger at white heat. He left the house, locking the doors behind him, and did not breathe free again until he was on the street.

An hour later he was standing on the sidewalk looking closely at a certain house.

"She used to come to this house when she got out of the old place for a spell. Her sister owned it when she died, and I believe left it to her. But I will see."

The hour was not very late, and he rung the bell that sent a musical tinkle through the hall.

A woman's face appeared at the threshold, and catching a glimpse of it, Simon forced his body into the house and stood before Violet.

He had found the woman who had betrayed him.

"Heavens! you?" cried the woman, whose face was white.

"Why not? Did you expect to escape me? I would have followed you to the ends of the world. I am here to demand an explanation, and then to punish."

For a moment there was no reply.

"I could not see them die in that trap—"

"When did you get chicken-hearted?" broke in Simon. "I always thought you had a heart of stone."

To this there was no reply, but the next moment the door at the end of the hall opened and a tall, muscular female came forward.

"Great Caesar's ghost!" exclaimed Simon, falling back. "I did not look for you here."

"I guess not, but I am here all the same. Stand where you are, Simon Slyboots. I want to talk to you."

He kept his place, for the speaker caught him by the shoulder, and with his vaunted courage oozing out at his finger ends, he looked up into the face of Mother Magog.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DEAD COMES BACK.

SHUT up in the house occupied by Captain Ortiz, the cool head of the plot, Billy Winks found a good deal to occupy his time.

He had to keep his eyes open, and not one movement of the captain escaped him.

Of course he could not follow the Cuban upon the street—that was not his business—but he could watch those who came to see him and take all the mental notes he could.

On the second day Captain Ortiz made an elaborate toilet and went out.

This was just the opportunity the boy detective had been waiting for.

He waited some time after the man's departure and then slipped into the room generally occupied by him. He thought that perhaps the Cuban had gone for a visit to the Centipede, and that he would have a good deal of time on his hands.

In a little while the young ferret was looking through the captain's private room.

Of course he found everything locked, but with a bit of wire which he found in the house, he picked one of the numerous locks, and soon fell to looking at the contents of the Cuban's desk.

Billy discovered there a good many papers, the most of which had no especial significance in his eyes, but all at once he came across a peculiar-looking package, which he turned over and over in his hands.

At last he carefully untied the strings that held it together and found in it, among other things, a copy of Napoleon Gregg's will.

"It's very natural that this will should be here," said the boy detective. "But here is another paper which looks a good deal like it. I don't see why there should be two copies of the same document. It looks to me like somebody has been practicing," and he carried the paper nearer the window and fell to examining it with more curiosity than ever.

"The whole thing is a fraud!" he suddenly cried. "The will that gives the money to Captain Ortiz is a forged document. These papers prove it. Some-how-or-other it was substituted for the real one which is missing. Captain Jarillo, as he calls himself now, never was the old man's heir in any light. I see through the whole thing. He has been at work long before the game really opened and has feathered his nest, perhaps with the secret help of Simon Slyboots and his pard, Reck Sloper."

The reader may imagine the excitement that filled Billy Winks's heart when he made this astounding discovery.

He had never seen anything like it.

For some time he could not credit the evidence of sight, but the papers in his hand spoke for themselves and he had to believe.

After awhile he replaced the package as carefully as he could and shut the desk.

"If I don't spring the trap soon the birds will get away," he said. "Captain Ortiz is liable to discover our escape from the old house and then the whole game would be up. The gang could go aboard the Centipede which, hoisting the Cuban flag, would steam away for foreign parts and I would have my trouble for my pains—the first failure since I have been playing ferret."

He was waiting anxiously for Captain Ortiz's return when he heard a footstep on the stoop and the bell rung.

Billy, bounding into the hallway, opened the door and looked at the person who faced him.

A well built man who seemed to be somewhat disguised, and when he mentioned Captain Ortiz's name in harsh tones he was admitted.

"Ain't at home, eh?" cried the caller, pushing past the boy and entering the captain's room. "Where is he, any how? Is he going to get away from me in this manner?"

"I can't tell you, sir."

"You can't, eh? You are his young spy, I presume?"

"I am not, but am in his employ."

There was a half insane look in the eyes that regarded Billy Winks and all at once with the agility of a tiger the man sprung to the very desk the boy ferret had just searched and tried to open the lid.

"Give me the key! I want to see if he has kept any records of the past."

"I have no key. It is in Captain Jarillo's pocket."

"But you are shrewd enough to open the desk for me. You look like a boy who can do almost anything. I want to see into that piece of furniture."

Billy stepped toward the man and looked him squarely in the face.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"That's a pretty question. I hardly know who I am—I have been living a blank life so long. I used to be— Yes, there was a time when I had a name; but I haven't heard it spoken in so many years, that I have almost forgotten it."

"You don't mean to say—"

"Ha, are you going to guess who I am?" and the man laughed. "I don't think you can do that."

Billy continued to look at the man, and felt that he was confronted by a mystery.

"Won't you open the desk for me?" asked the stranger.

"I half-believe it ought to be done."

"That is right. This man, Captain Ortiz—that is what I call him—is one of the biggest villains alive. When we fought our duel in the dark, he—"

The boy detective could not keep back a cry.

"I know you now! You have come back from the dead!" he exclaimed.

"Back from the dead? That's right, boy. I have come from nowhere else. Gradually the past has come back to me, incident by incident. I am once more Captain Marks of the Fleetwing, and I curse the day I first met Captain Ortiz, the pirate planter of Cuba. There was a time when I was the head of a happy family, but now I am alone in the world."

Billy thought of Molly the sewing-girl, but he did not mention her name.

"Now that I know you as Captain Marks, of whom I have heard, I want to say that I am playing a hand against this very man, Captain Jarillo. I am a spy in his house—"

"You, boy? What piece of infamy is he connected with now?"

"One of the coolest and deepest you ever heard of," was the reply. "I can't tell the story now, for he is liable to come back and interrupt it."

"I wish he would come!" and the hands of Captain Marks shut and his eyes gleamed madly. "I have longed to meet this wretch, and I have lived in hopes of encountering him some day."

Half an hour later, Captain Ortiz came back and threw himself upon a sofa in his library.

"Where's that confounded boy?" he cried.

Billy Winks heard the call and made his appearance. The room was darkened by lowered curtains, and Captain Ortiz leaned forward and eyed him closely.

"Who's been here?" he inquired.

"The usual number of cranks."

"Ha! and you gave all the bounce?"

Billy nodded.

Captain Ortiz strode hastily across the room. Unlocking the desk, he dived his hand into it as if looking for something and when he had found the package he drew it forth and thrust it into his bosom.

"That must not be lost," passed through the mind of the boy detective. "That is the proof against him and he shall not make way with it at this stage of the game."

"I'll be back later on," said Captain Ortiz, looking at the boy. "I want you to keep a sharp eye in your head and not to let the callers who want to fleece me because I've struck it rich, get a penny for their pains."

"Yes, sir"

He walked to the door, watched like a hawk by the boy, and in a moment he was gone.

"If I lose him now I lose the proof of guilt," said Billy.

Captain Ortiz had reached the nearest corner before he had any one at his heels and then he had a tracker in the boy he had employed to keep the bleeders of the city at bay.

He led Billy a good long chase through the city and at last turned into a narrow street and looked closely at the numbers of the houses there.

"He is going to Simon Slyboots," thought the young ferret. "The two will play the game out very speedily if they are left alone."

At that moment a footstep sounded behind the boy and he had turned half way round when his arm was clutched by a hand that seemed to have the grip of a vise, and he looked up into the grinning face of Simon himself.

Simon had caught him fairly and there was no doubt in the boy's mind that he was recognized.

"I thought I would run across you!" hissed the oily rascal. "I never let any one get away from me very long, so come along and I will introduce you to a trap that will hold you."

Billy felt himself dragged away by Simon, but this time he did not intend that the door of another trap should open to hide him from the world.

He drew back the full length of Simon Slyboots' arm and threw into the villain's face a look of grim defiance.

"You sha'n't put me in another of your traps. I know all and the hand of justice is hovering over every mother's son of you. Even now the cops are moving and in less than an hour you will be in the toils, it makes no matter what you do with me."

Billy felt the grip suddenly loosen on his arm. His words seemed to have scared it loose, and all at once he jerked back and was free.

Simon Slyboots stood like a man nonplused for a second; he glared at the boy detective, and even smiled.

"It is you who are in the trap, Simon," said Billy. "The toils are all about you, and yonder comes Captain Sharpe of the police."

The scoundrel turned, looked once at the officer who had turned the corner and bounded into the house entered by Captain Ortiz.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LAST BIRD CAGED.

BILLY WINKS did not expect to find either Simon Slyboots or Captain Ortiz in the house when it was searched by the officer who had made his appearance in the nick of time, for there is no doubt that Simon intended to execute a tigerish leap at the young detective if such an arrival had not taken place.

Both worthies had disappeared, but the officer and the boy looked at each other and smiled.

Billy went back to Jim and told his adventures while a watch was placed on Captain Ortiz's city house, besides one on the ship lying in the harbor.

Nothing was said to Molly Marks about her father's return, and it was agreed that Tom should remain with her for the present.

Several days passed, but nothing was heard of Simon or the captain.

Billy and Jim followed every clew that offered itself, but without avail.

They did not want to see the game get away, for the boy ferret's victory would not be complete without them, and he went everywhere looking for the pair.

One night, nearly a week after these events, the young shadower was seated in one of the numerous parks of the city when he saw a man glide into view, and after eyeing him for a moment, slip away as rapidly as possible.

"Ah, Simon, my sleek fox, so you are still in the city?" cried Billy, following the vanishing figure. "If I track you will I find the captain, or has he gone back to his dear Cuba, laughing in his sleeve how he gave me the slip?"

Billy was sure he had discovered the subtle Slyboots, and for nearly an hour he followed him up one street and down another till he was beginning to despair.

All at once Simon was joined by another figure, with whom he exchanged words and they separated.

But the keen eyes of the young detective had noticed the conversation, and in another instant he was after Simon once more.

"Catch the blackmailer, and he will tell on his employer," thought Billy.

Simon stopped at last.

Dodging down a flight of steps that led to a baserent room, the city fox vanished, and when Billy came up he saw a shoemaker's sign hanging conspicuously on the door.

At the same time he heard the sound of a hammer, and smiled when he crept down the steps and saw a man half-soling a pair of boots.

Ten minutes later the boy ferret opened the door and walked in.

The shoemaker looked up with a start, and then went on with his work.

The man at work was Simon Slyboots, turned shoemaker, not because he liked the business, but to deceive his hunters.

Billy knew him at once, in spite of his cunning disguise.

"Come, we will go up," said the boy, at which words Simon's hammer rested and he said: "What do you mean? I am busy now and can't go away from the job."

"You can't, eh?"

Billy Winks was standing near the door on the outside of which leaned a man in blue.

"But you will go with me, job or no job. I am here, Simon, to turn you over to the police."

The "shoemaker" lifted himself from the bench and threw the boot past the Boy Shadower's head.

The next instant he was looking into the muzzle of a revolver and behind it was the grinning face of Billy Winks.

"You have turned Crispin and it was a sly thought of yours, too. If I wanted a sleek job done I would give it to you, Simon."

"I had you once and was a fool for letting you escape. But do you think I am afraid of the gun you carry?"

"Just as you like. I am here to take you to the police and you are to give up your trade this very night."

"Which trade?" smiled Simon.

Billy gave the signal agreed upon between him and the officer waiting on the basement steps, and in a moment the door opened and Simon saw that he was fairly captured.

"Here's a shoe-shop for sale," laughed he with the nonchalance of a practiced villain. "I was going to give it up in a day, or so, but I am done with it now."

He seemed to reflect for a moment and then broke out fiercely:

"Have you captured the captain? Have you nailed the Cuban scoundrel whose cause I have served?"

"Not yet, but—"

"Maybe you don't know where he is. I want him with me. It will look better to have both of us together."

Simon continued and told the officer and Billy where to find the captain, and then gave up his hands for the manacles, remarking that he had had a good time playing the game for gold and that if he had been let alone, he would have bled Captain Ortiz till he had fleeced him out of every dollar of his ill-gotten gains.

"It was leech suck leech, but that's no matter," said Simon. "I don't think it a crime for one wolf to eat another, and I always act on that principle."

When he found himself in the cell at the station he felt of the iron bars and laughed.

"I guess you won't find Sloper. He got frightened and sloped, but if you run across the woman called Violet, the Death-Flower, I will esteem it a personal favor if you let me have an interview."

"And let her throat be in danger, Simon?" said Billy Winks. "We may want to use Violet, and she sha'n't get within reach of your hands."

Captain Ortiz was watching his chance, for when Billy and the officer went secretly to the house where Simon said he was to be found, he was not there, and Billy felt a pang of disappointment.

Was the head of the plot to get away at last? Was he to lose the pleasure of seeing the Cuban captain behind the bars, and thus fail to carry out the vow he had taken?

Sloper had sloped, as Simon said, and was not in the city; but as he was not such a very great rascal, he was not looked after with very much care.

Jim and Billy were on the pave the second night after Simon's capture, when Mother Magog's son grasped the boy detective's arm and called his attention to a man who was about to cross a street.

"That's the captain! Any one would know him by the way he carries his head."

In a flash the young Vidocq was dashing forward, and was at the man's heels when he suddenly turned.

"Don't let him grip you, Pilly!" cried Jim.

That seemed to tell the hunted man who was in his front, for he caught sight of the boy sharp, and instead of flying from him, he darted at him with a mad curse.

There was the gleam of desperation in the eyes of Captain Ortiz that reminded Billy of the light seen there when he hissed the jaguar at him on board the Centipede.

"Found at last! Now I will settle everything, and then they can have Captain Ortiz!" pealed from his throat.

Billy tried to meet the sudden attack, but it was too cyclonic in its nature to be avoided.

The Cuban captain came down upon him like a thunderbolt, and he was seized and lifted from his feet in an instant.

"I'll throw you under a car!" he cried, turning toward the middle of the street with his prisoner.

A car was near at hand, and Billy felt the fingers of Captain Ortiz sinking into his throat and shutting off his breath.

He was lifted above the rascal's head, and in another moment would have been thrown under the rapidly passing car, if Captain Ortiz had not staggered back with a groan.

Jim had recovered his presence of mind and leaped to the rescue.

The young man had thrown himself upon the maddened captain with all his strength, and it was his hand dealing a blow that sent the Cuban to the stones.

The blow had been dealt in the very nick of time, and when Captain Ortiz pulled himself together he knew that the game for Napoleon Gregg's gold had failed.

It was a happy party that assembled under the roof of the Gregg mansion on the avenue a few nights after the last events.

It consisted of Billy Winks, Tom Wagner, Molly, Timothy Turk, Molly's "Uncle Josh" and another person who had a wonderful story to tell.

The narrator was Captain Marks, for years believed to be dead, but while Molly listened to his story with her hand in his, she knew that a father had come back to her from the tropics.

Simon Slyboots took his defeat with grim good nature, but he maintained that if he had thought that Violet intended to turn against them and liberate Billy and Tom, he would have blocked her game for, as he said, "as long as we had Captain Ortiz under our thumb, there was a fortune at our command."

It was never known whose hand he had shown the Cuban in proof of Tom Wagner's death, as he would never tell; but it is believed that one of the dissecting rooms furnished him with it.

The Cuban was convicted of fraud and sent "up the river" for a long term, and Simon was his companion.

Reck Sloper never turned up, and Violet also vanished, but not until after the trial.

Jim and Mother Magog were rewarded for their part in helping to outwit the conspirators, and Billy Winks, proud of his last conquest, went back to his little "office" to wait for "another job."

I have but to add that the friendship between Molly and Tom has ripened into something deeper, and that "in the course of human events," as Billy remarks when he refers to the matter, there is apt to be a wedding.

We congratulate Tom and Molly in advance.
THE END.

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